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PRIVATE TINKER





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Private Tinker
and Other Stories





"THE OTHER MAN UTTERED A SHRILL CRY."—
Page 16.

Private Tinker

And Other Stories

BY

~~JOHN STRANGE WINTER~~ present of

H.E.V. (P.) Stannard.

AUTHOR OF

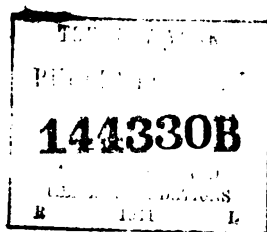
'BOOTLES' BABY' 'I MARRIED A WIFE' 'RED COATS' 'HE
WENT FOR A SOLDIER' 'AUNT JOHNNIE' 'A SEVENTH
CHILD' 'MRS. BOB' 'A BORN SOLDIER' 'THE
MAJOR'S FAVORITE' 'A BLAME-
LESS WOMAN' ETC.

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY
WILLIAM A. McCULLOUGH.

New York and London
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

C 1895

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PRIVATE TINKER.

"No, Private Tinker," said she, "it ain't no use. I've been brought up different, and what suits you wouldn't suit me, so it's no good to say nothing more about it."

"But, Nelly," said Tinker, ruefully, "surely you might give a poor chap a chance. I don't ask you to take me till I get my step."

"When you get your step, Private Tinker," remarked the girl in a scornful voice, "will be more than time enough for you to ask me to take you. Till then, if you please, we won't say no more about it."

"But, Nelly," he began again, but only to be interrupted once more.

"When you get your step, Private Tinker——" she remarked, with such emphasis that at last he turned round upon her.

"Nelly Maloney," he said, in a tone of suppressed bitterness, "I know what you mean—that I never shall get my step at all. But don't you be so sure of that. There's good stuff in me, and I mean to make the best of my time

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now, if I haven't done as much in the past. I'll make you proud of me yet, you see if I don't."

"I hope you will," retorted Nelly, rather acidly.

"Yes, I know what you're thinking about," he said between his teeth. "You've never got over my getting into that scrape about the blackbeetles."

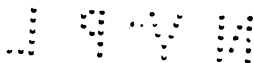
"It isn't everyone who likes the thoughts of blackbeetles in their beds," admitted Miss Maloney. "And, say what you will, 'twas a scurvy trick to play on a woman."

"I didn't play it on a woman," Tinker flashed out.

"You filled Sergeant Morrison's bed with blackbeetles, didn't you?" she asked with apparent innocence.

"Yes, Sergeant Morrison's bed, but I didn't know that his missis was at home. You know perfectly well that she had been away and that she came back unbeknown to anyone that very night. How was I to know that she was coming back?"

"Well, it was unfortunate," remarked Miss Maloney loftily. "Not that I should have blamed you so much for that, if you'd only had the sense not to get found out. Everyone knows Sergeant Morrison is a regular brute, and most of 'em think it served him jolly well right. But to go and get found out and to make yourself a marked man— Well, really,



Private Tinker, I haven't common patience with you, that I haven't."

"I'll make my name in the Scarlet Lancers yet, Nelly Maloney; and when that time comes maybe you'll be sorry you flouted me as you've done this day," said Private Tinker.

"Maybe so," she returned.

"You know you like me better than anyone else in the Scarlet Lancers, Nelly," he cried piteously.

"You get your step," was her practical reply, "and then we'll talk about liking. Less talk and more do—that's my motto, Private Tinker."

With that she whisked back into her father's quarters and shut the door behind her. Private Tinker stood for a moment staring at the fast-closed door with a very rueful countenance, and finally, after scratching his chin thoughtfully, he turned and went away feeling sore at heart and yet full of determination.

"I'll do something or other to make her proud of me," he said to himself. "See if I don't."

Now a good many men make such resolutions as this, and, moreover, a good many men find them more easy to make than to carry into effect. Private Tinker, who was a regular limb of mischief, found his good resolves not only difficult, but well-nigh impossible to carry out. You see, a soldier who has once forfeited the good offices of his troop-sergeant-major may,

Private Tinker.

on the whole, just as well put himself out of the reckoning at once, so far as any favor *is* concerned. And, as Tinker had been convicted of a most shameless practical joke on his superior, there was little or no mercy to be obtained at his hands. In short, Tinker was always in trouble, was always being reported for something or other, and his life was neither a prosperous nor a happy one.

Not that it was exactly unhappy. Some men who get into their superiors' bad books lead wretched and isolated lives. Years ago I told the story of one, Calcraft, who was driven to commit suicide—or to try to do so, which is practically the same thing—entirely owing to the enmity of one of the non-commissioned officers of his particular troop. But Tinker did not suffer in the same way. Though he was not happy, because something was always going wrong—and, in a cavalry regiment, that just makes all the difference between Paradise and a less pleasant place—his animal spirits did not get less exuberant, nor did his physical man look any less healthy and well nourished ; but so far as promotion was concerned, the promotion which was to make Nelly Maloney cast in her lot with his, his chances were simply *nil*.

However, before Private Tinker had quite given up the hope that Nelly Maloney might some day come to acknowledge that she had

been mistaken in him, the Scarlet Lancers were ordered off to Egypt, and Nelly Maloney, together with all the other women-folk, was left at home to think over all the hard and cruel things she had let slip off her tongue during the past few months, to think over and to repent them.

Oddly enough, Tinker did not get a chance of a word with her till the regiment was actually on the move. Then he managed to give her hand a squeeze and to ask for a word to wish him luck. Nelly, whose blue Irish eyes were drowned in tears, was by that time quite beyond any idea of sniffing at him. "Private Tinker," she said, with quivering lips, "you'll keep an eye on Dad, won't you? He's that reckless . . . there's no knowing what he mayn't do, but if I know you're keeping an eye on him, I shall feel easier in my mind;" and then the ready tears began to course down her pale cheeks and she hid her eyes with her arm.

"So help me, God," was Private Tinker's emphatic reply. And then he caught hold of her and kissed her unresisting lips.

That was their farewell.

At first, although the regiment had left York Barracks in such downcast gloom, it really seemed to them all as if going on active service was nothing more nor less than a pleasant jaunt. The good ship *Clyde*, which carried them to the seat of war, was a fine vessel, and

after the first shock of parting had worn off, life was easy and amusing enough on board of her. Various entertainments were got up, notably a circus performance for the benefit of the wives and children left behind who were not on the strength of the regiment. And when, at last, the Scarlet Lancers found themselves in Alexandria, they still felt that they had exceedingly little to complain of, excepting, that is, for the flies and suchlike small deer, which made the lives of most a burden to them.

But they were not left very long to revel in the joys and pleasures of the half-ruined city. Instead, they were moved on to a spot about five miles from the main body of troops, and lying quite near to the little town of Abu Goum. Between the two camps lay the rebel lines which were a short while later to be crushed and rendered powerless by the carefully-planned closing up of the two British forces. And meantime, those who were lying in the camp nearest to the town had to exercise great precautions lest the small guerilla warfare, which was constantly kept up, should result in a very considerable loss, for the rebels seemed to be ever on the watch, and showed by many little signs that they did not despise the day of small things. And then it was that Private Tinker began to feel that there was more than a chance of his being able to do his sweetheart's last bidding.

In truth Sergeant Maloney, who, like all Irishmen, was of a cheery, happy-go-lucky, not to say devil-may-care disposition, could not and would not believe that he was not as safe in the environs of the British camp outside Abu Goum as he had been on the road between the Cavalry Barracks at York and the little village of Fulford, which lies half a mile away.

"Shure, and what would these nagurs be after meddlin' wid me for?" he demanded one day when Tinker had expiated on the dangers of venturing outside the camp boundaries. "It's meself that feels shut in and mooney if I don't be gettin' me stroll of an evenin'. Shure, if you're always on the look out for danger, danger'll come to ye, ten chances to wan."

"Well, Sergeant," remarked Tinker, as persistently as he dared, "I make no doubt as you know best, but there's Nelly at home fretting her pretty eyes out for you."

"Ah, and by the powers that's a good wan," cried the Sergeant, with a rollicking laugh. "So Nelly's fretting her pretty eyes out for me, is she? Shure, it's a fine broth of a boy ye are, but this isn't me first campaign, youngster, and I tell ye, there's little to be gained by mollycoddlin' wanself. Devil a bit."

The Sergeant walked away with his head well up in the air, leaving Tinker gazing ruefully after him. "You blustering old devil," he said to himself, "I believe you just want to

go and get your idiotic self done for, so that Nelly may blame me for it. But I'll be up-sides with you—see if I don't—you just see if I don't. I'll watch you, Sergeant Maloney, and I'll keep you safe in spite of yourself."

Now it happened that Sergeant Maloney was one of those foolhardy persons who occasionally get the Victoria Cross for doing some bold act which renders good service in times of need. His glory was in fighting, in getting through dangerous places by the skin of his teeth, and talking about it with a fine assumption of indifference for a year or two afterwards. He loved to tell how once, in the early days of his Indian soldiering, he had been lucky enough to be among those sent to settle a little affair in the hills, just a little difference of opinion between one hill tribe and another. The tale had grown and grown with years, until the deeds of one Patrick Maloney had somehow become so magnified that probably no one who had happened to be engaged in this little war would have recognized them as having taken place during any affair in which they had borne a part. Some of them bore a strong family resemblance to stories told of Chinese Gordon, or, to go yet a little further back, to tales told of the Mutiny heroes. But Sergeant Maloney believed them as implicitly as George IV. believed that he had been at the battle of Waterloo.

It was therefore not without reason that

Tinker set himself to see that Sergeant Maloney did not get himself into serious trouble by his foolhardy ways. And from that time on, whenever Tinker was not tied hand and foot by the exigencies of duty, he was always to be seen shadowing Nelly's father wherever he went. His self-imposed task was no sinecure. Far from it, indeed.

After one or two efforts to work on the Sergeant's feelings by bringing in Nelly's name, Tinker gave up speaking of her altogether. For if ever he ventured to say that there was a someone anxiously waiting at home for his return, so surely did Sergeant Maloney break out into some fresh indiscretion. "By the powers, me boy," he remarked one day, when Tinker had so far forgotten himself, "wan would think that the little girl at home in the ould country was as big a coward as you'd have me be. Shure and ye never made a greater mistake in all your life. Me little girl is as brave as a lion, and as restless as a hawk. A real chip of the ould block," and forthwith Sergeant Maloney swaggered out beyond the lines just to show that the ould block was well worth having chips of its own.

And at last, after the rule of a pitcher going twenty times to the well and getting broken at last, Sergeant Maloney went a little too far, and one dark evening, when he was taking what he was pleased to call his constitutional, Tinker,

who was shadowing him as usual, saw a couple of dark forms suddenly rush out from the shelter of a few shrubs and fling themselves upon the old soldier, who, completely taken by surprise, was struck to the ground without so much as a struggle to keep his feet. Quick as thought, and without a moment's hesitation, Tinker sprang forward and discharged his revolver at the head of the man nearest to him. A hideous yell was the immediate result, and he fell to the ground and lay there still as a log. The other man uttered a shrill cry, and turning on his assailant, fought with grim fierceness, not so much for his own life as for the life of Tinker, and the Sergeant, who had struggled, half-stunned, to his feet, joined in the *mêlée*. In less time than it takes me to write the words, a handful of Arabs ran out from some neighboring shelter, and some of the Scarlet Lancers, picketed near by, ran forward to see what the shouts meant, and to succor any of their comrades who might have unexpectedly found themselves in difficulties. The result was that three Arabs were left lying dead on the spot, while Sergeant Maloney, the cause of the fracas, escaped without so much as a scratch.

"I think we settled that little lot," he remarked, in a tone of the utmost satisfaction. "And, shure, if it hadn't been for you, Tinker, me boy, it would have been all U P with Pat-

rick Maloney, B troop, the Scarlet Lancers. Why, Tinker, me boy, what's amiss?"

"Oлло, Tinker," exclaimed one of the others, stooping to help Tinker, who had slipped down on to his knees, "wot's up, old feller?"

"I'm done for," gasped Tinker. "One of those devils slipped his knife into me. Don't leave me here for 'em to finish. It's no go, mate—I—I—" and then he toppled forward on his face.

It was but the work of a few minutes for them to swing him amongst them, and to carry him within the lines. And in less than a quarter of an hour Tinker came back to himself again to find that he was in the hospital tent, being carefully examined by the doctors and their orderlies. "I'm done for," he said, faintly. "I can feel my life slipping out with every breath."

"Keep yourself quiet, my man," said the older of the two surgeons, kindly. "It's not so bad as you think. Anyway, we'll do our best for you."

"Tell Nelly I did my best for you, Sergeant," murmured Tinker, seeing the repentant blusterer hovering near. "I——" but the sentence was never finished—Tinker was dead.

MAJOR VANDELEUR'S TRUST.

CHAPTER I.

UNDER the brilliant stars of an Afghan sky two men were smoking—the one, George Vandeleur, Major of the White Lancers, the other a mere boy, by name Geoffrey Mainwaring, a lately-joined subaltern of the Cuirassiers.

Major Vandeleur was a man of little more than forty—a handsome man, but with a cloud of care over the eyes which ought to have been full of life and energy. Young Mainwaring was scarcely more than a boy, long and lithe and strong, with a mere shading of dark down on his upper lip, and still the gay laughter that he had brought with him a few months before. He looked aside at his companion as a sigh—an unmistakable sigh—fell upon his ear.

“Major,” he said, “you’re down in the mouth to-night, sir. I hope you had no bad news by the mail to-day?”

The older man shook himself together. “No, not that, Mainwaring—quite the contrary, in fact, for my home news was most cheering.

But I feel somehow—well, I've got a sort of presentiment hanging about me, and I can't shake it off, try as I will."

"I don't think, Major," said the lad respectfully, "that sitting out here is likely to help you to get rid of it—I don't really."

"No, perhaps not. Let us go in," the Major answered.

Before either of them rose from their chairs, however, the Major asked the subaltern a question: "Have you any sisters, Mainwaring?"

"No, sir; nor brothers," he replied.

"Ah! And your father is living?"

"No, Major. My father died fifteen years ago, when I was quite a little chap. My mother died when I was born."

"Then you are quite alone in the world?"

"That's pretty much about it, sir," in the tone of one who did not find the position a particularly trying one.

"Ah! Yes, yes; but it's not so bad for a boy to be left as a girl."

"I should say not," said young Mainwaring; "but, for my part, sir, it's so long since I had any relations that I've got pretty well used to it."

"And your guardian?"

"Oh! my guardian's an awful old duffer," the young man answered promptly. "It is no fault of his that I didn't go to the Jews and make ducks and drakes of my property years ago. As it was, however, I got along on a very beg-

garly allowance, and put the time in till I became my own master."

"Oh ! then you are of age ? " said the senior in surprise.

" Yes. I am nearly two-and-twenty, sir. Late in joining ? Well, that's so, but you see, Major, I had to do the Militia grind, for my old fool of a guardian had what he called scruples about my going to Sandhurst. Yes, it was a nuisance, but it's pretty much about the same now."

He had pulled himself into an attitude expressive of readiness to follow the older man's lead, either in rising or sitting still. Major Vandeleur apparently had forgotten that they had just suggested going within doors.

" I don't know why I should tell you, Mainwaring," he said, filling his pipe again with slow but steady fingers ; but I have an idea that I shall never get out of this alive."

" Indigestion, sir," said the young man promptly. He did not suffer in that way himself.

" Never had it in my life," answered the Major with equal promptitude. " No, it's something quite different—and the thought of my little girl at home clings to me like a ghost."

" Your little girl, Major ? " exclaimed the young man. " Why, I didn't even know you were married."

" No more I am—at least, my wife died five years ago," Major Vandeleur answered, " and

I'm like you, Mainwaring, I haven't got a relation in the world, not one except my little girl. Ah ! poor little woman ; it goes to my heart to think what may become of her if anything happens to me."

" Oh ! but nothing will happen to you, sir ; at least, it's very unlikely," cried the young man, trying to speak with a good deal more cheerfulness than he felt. " And, you know, thinking about it is the very worst thing possible, and the most likely of anything to bring it about. You oughtn't to do it, Major, really."

" No, I know," smiling faintly ; " so I'll go indoors and see what the rest of them are after."

He got up then, and went along the half-ruined veranda towards the large room which was the temporary messroom of his regiment, and young Mainwaring followed him in, going straightway in search of what he called " an iced peg," feeling more than sorry for the handsome fellow who seemed to have taken such a fancy to him since they had been thrown together in this dreary land, wherein all Europeans became as brothers in their feeling towards each other, and yet, though sorry, he was glad to get away from his immediate vicinity.

" By Jove ! " his thoughts ran, as he put the glass down after draining its contents, " but I should feel deuced uncomfortable if I had that

sort of foreboding. And he has a child at home, poor old chap!"

Well, the following day there was a sortie from Caubool, and some of our men were killed, and several officers dangerously wounded, among them Major Vandeleur. And an hour or two later, when the fighting was over and young Mainwaring got back into camp, somebody came up to him and said: "By-the-bye, are you Mr. Mainwaring, of the Cuirassiers?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Major Vandeleur, of my regiment, has been brought in badly wounded—I believe mortally so—and he is asking for you. Will you go and see him?"

"To be sure. By Jove! poor chap, he was expecting this," Mainwaring exclaimed. "'Pon my word, I am sorry. Go to him? By Jove! yes, that I will. Where is he?"

"In his own quarters. I'll show you," said the other, and in less than three minutes Geoffrey Mainwaring, all dirty, dusty and battle-stained as he was, was shown into the room where George Vandeleur lay dying. Young Mainwaring went up to the bed as softly as he could, but the Major heard his footsteps and opened his eyes, unmistakably the eyes of a dying man.

"Major, I'm so awfully sorry——" the younger man began.

"Yes," said the other faintly. "All up with me now. I knew they'd get me. Wanted to see you," and there he stopped and closed his eyes, and Mainwaring looked round anxiously for the doctor, thinking that the poor fellow was on the very point, as he put it afterwards, of slipping his cable.

The Major, however, opened his eyes again. "No, don't call anyone. I shall hold out a bit longer. I want to ask you something."

"Yes, sir, I am listening," young Mainwaring answered. "What is it, sir?"

"My little girl," said the Major, with a look of appealing anguish, "she's all alone in the world, and I—I've never made my will or anything."

"Then make it at once, sir," said young Mainwaring promptly.

"Yes, I know. I've told Vickers." Vickers was the chaplain. "But a guardian—she must have a guardian—and, Mainwaring, I want you to be her guardian. Will you?"

"Of course I will, sir," said the young man instantly. At that terrible moment he would have promised anything which would have given or seemed to give the dying man a moment's peace of mind.

"You're young, my boy," said the other with an effort, "but you've got a clear head, and you've kept yourself straight."

"I'll do my best for her, sir," said the other manfully.

"There will be a few hundreds a year—enough to bring her up properly," the Major said, more feebly. "Then, will—you—tell—Vickers?"

So Mainwaring went and fetched the chaplain, and the Major told him that he was to put down the name of Geoffrey Mainwaring, of the Cuirassiers, as guardian and sole trustee of his child Mary, then in charge of Mrs Templeton, of No. 17 South Kensington Square. "She's at school there," he said faintly to Mainwaring.

It was soon done, for Mr. Vickers had got the will ready, leaving only the name of the child's guardian to be inserted. Then the Major, who was rapidly sinking, scrawled his name in the place where the doctor indicated; the chaplain and the doctor both added their names as witnesses, and the dying man closed his eyes feeling that after all it had not been too late.

They had not a very long vigil, for before the dark fell George Vandeleur had entered into rest and the light which knows no night, and Geoffrey Mainwaring went out of the quiet room with a new burden of responsibility upon his shoulders.

"By Jove! but it's an odd situation for me," he muttered, as he sat on the edge of his cot thinking it all over. "Here am I guardian to a child. I don't know how old she is, nor what

she is like, nor what to do with her. I don't know anything! By Jove! but the whole thing's extraordinary. Well, anyway, I must do my best, for the sake of the dear old chap that's gone."

CHAPTER II.

A YEAR had gone by, and Geoffrey Mainwaring found himself in London again for the first time since he had become the guardian of Major Vandeleur's daughter.

He had, of course, written to the lady in whose care the child was, had explained that by the late Major Vandeleur's will he had become her guardian, that he hoped she was well and was not fretting much after her father, that at present he had no prospect of coming home from India, and therefore if the child was well and happy there was no need to disturb existing arrangements, and that he would instruct his lawyers to continue the same payments as had been made by the late Major Vandeleur.

After this he received several letters from Mrs. Templeton. In the first one she expressed her sorrow at the Major's death, told him that Mary, not having seen her father for more than three years, was not, naturally, in as deep grief as the death of a parent would under more

ordinary circumstances have occasioned; th she was well and, she trusted, happy—and the letter went on until Geoffrey Mainwaring got to the end of it and laid it down with pitying "Poor little soul, it must be poor sort of comfort living with an old cat like that."

The other letters were of a business nature pure and simple, and they invariably ended, "Mary is well and happy, gets on very well with her lessons, and wishes to be remembered to her guardian." And somehow, whenever Geoffrey Mainwaring got to the end of one of Mrs. Templeton's stiff and precise epistles, he always said to himself, "Poor little soul!"—which was Mary Vandeleur, of course.

Well, at the end of a year he got a very bad return of an attack of fever which he had had in Afghanistan, and so nearly slipped his cable, to use his own words, that he was bundled off home in a desperate hurry. So it happened that at the end of May he found himself in London once more, and really feeling quite his own man again, so much so as to have a certain shamed feeling about him of being a complete fraud to be home on sick leave.

And, naturally enough, his first thought, having no home ties of his own, was of the little orphan in South Kensington Square, whose life, though he had never seen her, had been so strangely bound up with his own. Therefore as soon as he had turned himself round, so to

speaking, he got into a cab and went off to see her.

"I suppose I'd better ask for the old cat first," he said to himself as he rang the bell.

Yes, Mrs. Templeton was at home; so he sent in his card, and was shown into a stiff and ghastly drawing-room, hung round like a bazaar with trophies of needle-work—a dull and cheerless room which looked as if it had not had a fire lighted in the terribly well-polished grate for at least a month.

"Good Heavens, what a vault to live in!" said he, as his eyes wandered around.

Then the door opened and a tall and stately lady came in, looked at him in some surprise, then back at the card still in her hand.

"Mr. Geoffrey Mainwaring?" she said.

"Yes, that is my name," he answered.

"Mary Vandeleur's guardian?" said Mrs. Templeton, in a voice of the utmost astonishment.

"Yes," smiling. "I seem to surprise you somehow or other."

"Well, I confess that I am surprised," said the schoolmistress candidly. "I—well, I thought Major Vandeleur would have chosen some one older, and——"

"Chosen!" Mainwaring broke in. "Ah! poor fellow, it wasn't exactly a case of *choosing* with him, you see, but of taking the best man he could get at the moment."

They talked together for a few minutes, and then Mrs. Templeton rose from her seat.

"Come into my room, Mr. Mainwaring," she said, "and then I will send Mary to you. It is more cosy than this room, which I never sit in. I must go now, for I have a class waiting."

"Certainly," he replied courteously.

She led him into a small and very comfortable room, such as gave him a different and a better opinion of her.

"I will send her to you," she said, and then she left him.

He waited for some five or ten minutes before the door opened, standing comfortably warming himself before the fire, for as yet he felt chilly in the English climate. He turned as he heard the door open, and to his intense astonishment saw a tall, slender girl dressed in plain mourning, which threw into greater prominence the mass of soft golden hair which was coiled at the top of her little shapely head.

"Good morning," he stammered, so thoroughly taken aback that he hardly knew what to say; "but you—you are not—not my ward?"

"I am Mary Vandeleur," she said, looking at him with a pair of frank, beautiful blue eyes, so like her father's care-clouded ones, as he well remembered them the night before that fatal sortie from Caubool.

"But—but you are grown up," he cried. "I

—I thought you were a little girl. I have brought you a doll."

At this point I am bound to say that Mary Vandeleur burst out laughing.

"It is very funny," she cried; "but tell me," growing grave again, "did poor Father never tell you anything about me?"

"Not a word until the evening before that last sortie when he was wounded. And then he only spoke of you as his little girl, and—and I thought you were six, or ten, or something like that."

"Nay, I am sixteen; I shall be seventeen next month, Mr. Mainwaring," she cried—"and Mrs. Templeton says I am very old for my age."

"I was never so astonished in my life," he exclaimed; "never! I can't believe it. Why, it's absurd on the face of it that *I* should be *your* guardian."

A sunny smile crossed Mary Vandeleur's face.

"Well," she said, "it *is* absurd. I suppose I shall have to look up to you and respect you, but really—don't think me rude—but you look almost as much in need of a guardian as I do."

"And so I am almost," he answered with a laugh. "Why, the old lady—Mrs. Templeton, that is—she looked at me in such astonishment that I almost laughed in her face; but, knowing you, well she might."

"Mrs. Templeton is utterly shocked and

scandalized," Mary Vandeleur returned. "She came to me just now. 'My dear,' she said, 'your *guardian* has just come, and is waiting to see you; and, my dear Mary, he is a BOY,' she added."

"Well," said he, "of course that is a matter I cannot help. I didn't *ask* your poor father to make me your guardian; but, all the same, what the poor dear fellow could have been *thinking* of, I can't imagine."

"Poor Father!" murmured the girl with a sigh; "he never troubled himself about the conventional idea of things. If a man or woman had a face he liked and felt inclined to trust, he never troubled himself as to what the world would think of his trusting them. And I don't know that it is a bad plan—he very seldom was deceived in people."

The compliment to him was not a small one, the more because it was an absolutely unconscious one; nor was Geoffrey Mainwaring slow to notice it. They were still standing before the fire, and at the mention of her father he had taken her hands in his and had kept them there ever since. And when she reached the last sentence he had hard work not to press the little soft fingers resting within his own with a wholly unguardianlike warmth. He did resist the temptation, however, and so the fingers remained where they were.

"I don't quite see what is to be done," he

said at last. "You know you ought to have a snuffy old grump for a guardian, either a crabbed old bachelor, or a man with a horrid crabbed old wife who would snub you persistently. It's the proper thing to do. But as I am not old, nor crabbed, nor married, I can only do the best I can. Supposing I take you out for a drive?"

"Mrs. Templeton won't let me go," she said promptly.

"You forget I am your guardian," he cried. "She can't help herself. I have a right to take you out for a drive; *all* guardians have. What's the use of being anyone's guardian else?"

"She won't let me go," said Miss Vandeleur with conviction.

"Shall we send and ask?"

"Yes," she said frankly. "I should like to go immensely."

So Mr. Mainwaring sent a polite little note to Mrs. Templeton, asking if he might take his ward for a drive, and the request so mollified the lady that she came to speak to him again and to ask him to return and dine with Mary and herself, to see the doll which he had brought for the child he had believed his ward to be, and generally to be very gracious and forgiving to his very embarrassing youthfulness.

As Geoffrey Mainwaring had very truly said,

he could not help himself, either in the matter of his own juvenility—and he was juvenile when you consider him in the light of a guardian—or the grown-up condition of his ward. Yet certainly he might have helped going away from No. 17 and thinking about Mary Vandeleur through all the hours of that livelong night, and he might have helped going off to No. 17 again as soon as he decently could the next morning and asking permission to take her to the Academy. As Mrs. Templeton very naturally remarked to her sister, a guardian so abnormally young was a very serious piece of business.

And yet who was to say him nay? He was her legal guardian, and if he had chosen to remove her from the delightful circle under Mrs. Templeton's care and take her off to India with him there and then, neither Mrs. Templeton, no, nor Mary Vandeleur herself, was in a position to say to him that he should not do it. He did not, however, wish to do anything outrageous or to shock the good lady's fine feelings of conventionalism; but he came and went to and from No. 17 duly and truly, and Mary Vandeleur was the envy and admiration of every girl in the school.

"I want to take you to the Doré Gallery," he said to her one day when he had carried her off from her lessons.

"The Doré!" she repeated doubtfully.
"Oh! I've been there."

"Yes, I know. At least, I don't know, but that doesn't matter. It's a quiet place where one can talk," he answered.

So they went to the Doré Gallery, and were soon blinking dismally in an effort to accustom their eyes to the dim religious light which prevails at that particular exhibition.

"Mary," he said presently, when they had found a comfortable seat, "I've been thinking about—about things. And you know it's perfectly absurd our going on doing this ward and guardian business. We really ought to stop it."

"Well, but how?" cried she in dismay; she was well satisfied enough with her guardian, and had not the very smallest desire for a change. "Am I such a very dreadful bother to you? Because if I am, you know, I don't think you need take me about so much. Guardians don't generally, you know. One of our girls has a guardian who never comes near her."

She looked up at him so piteously, this little lonely one, that Geoffrey Mainwaring's heart began to beat faster, and a great lump rose up for a minute or so in his throat.

"My dear little love," he said, taking her hand under cover of the gloom, "don't you understand? I only want to give you up in a certain way. I want you to give yourself to me for always—don't you see?"

"To be married?" she whispered.

"Yes," he answered joyously; "to be married."

"But,"—and the little soft hand clung to his—"will they allow it?"

"They—who?" he asked, "You forget; I am the only person who has power to prevent it."

For a long time they sat there, and their silence was their troth-plight; both were too happy to speak—each was supremely content.

"Mary! Dearest?" he said inquiringly.

"I was just thinking," she answered, turning to him with an ineffable smile, "that dear Father's last instinct proved the best that could ever have been—but I shall keep that doll as long as I live."

A CROWN OF ASPHODEL.

"My regrets follow you to the grave."

—*Language of Flowers.*

CHAPTER I.

"AND what was he like?" asked a subdued, patient voice, a voice that was not without a ring of suffering.

"Very good-looking," a girl's voice replied. "Not exactly handsome, you know, Mother; but very big and strong, and straight-looking."

"And he stopped the Chicken?"

"Yes; she had got the bit fairly between her wicked little teeth, and, though I sat back and tugged at her mouth till I nearly tugged her head off, she got the better of me and tore away like the wind. . . . Well, you know how the Chicken can go when she is in the mood."

"It was a mercy you were not killed," cried the mother in a tone of distress. "I shall never feel really easy about her again."

"Oh, I think she was more frightened than vicious," said the girl, quietly. "After all, you know, Mother, it can't be a joke for a pony to have a clucking hen suddenly rush across the

road right under its legs. And the Chicken has never been 'took' that way before."

"Well, perhaps not. And this young man was able to stop her?"

"He just stopped my lady beautifully, and held her tight, soothing her and talking to her till she got simmered down a little. 'You must not be angry with your pony,' he said to me. I'm sure I don't know whether he thought I was going to flog the Chicken mercilessly all the way home or not, but I couldn't help laughing outright at his earnestness in begging her off. I wonder who he is," she ended.

Mrs. Annesley put out her hand and rang the bell. "You think he was a gentleman, Nannie?" she said, carelessly; for so long as her child was safe she took no particular interest in the young man who had been good enough to rescue her from an exceedingly awkward situation.

"Oh, dear me, yes, Mother," returned Nannie, promptly.

"Let me have tea at once," Mrs. Annesley said to the servant who came in answer to her summons. "Well, then, in that case, I must tell your father to find him out and ask him to dinner, or something civil of that kind. What did you say his name was?"

"French, so he said," Nannie replied. "But he did not give me the very faintest notion of his address, or whether he was staying in the

neighborhood or not. Still, I should think he was one of the officers at Fort Helen. He looked like a soldier, anyway."

Such a subject is soon over and done with in a busy household, and when Colonel Annesley had been told all about it and had declared his intention of looking in at Fort Helen, the Artillery quarters three miles away, to see if he could not discover the gentleman who had saved his daughter from what might have been a very serious accident, the family thought and said no more about the matter, excepting that Nannie herself found her day dreams taking the form of the stalwart young man who owned up to the not very romantic name of French.

A week or so later, however, Colonel Annesley drove over to Fort Helen, and called on the officer commanding the battery; and in a careless and casual kind of way asked whether one of his officers was not called French?

"Of course—George French," that gentleman replied. "Why you must remember his father, Cut-throat French, of the 14th?"

"Bless my soul, of course I do," the Colonel cried, in great surprise, "of course I do; and a headlong dare-devil he was in his time, I can tell you."

"I suppose he was; but he was rather before my day," said the other. "At all events his son does not take after him, for a quieter and

steadier chap does not exist than George French."

"Takes after his mother, perhaps," said Colonel Annesley, pleasantly. "By-the-bye, do you happen to know if he is to be found? I want to call on him."

"I'll find out in two minutes," said the Major, pulling the nearest bell. "Oh, just inquire if Mr. French is in his quarters. Colonel Annesley to see him."

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

A few moments later George French came in, and the three sat talking together for some little time, and drinking the glass of sherry which, in messrooms, does duty for the feminine cup of tea; and then Major Inglis excused himself, on the score of orderly-room business, and went away, leaving the old soldier and the young one alone together.

"I believe that I am very much in your debt, Mr. French," began the Colonel, when the door had closed behind Major Inglis.

George French looked up in surprise. "Really, and how is that?" he asked.

"Well, it was my daughter's pony that you were good enough to stop the other day, and my wife and I are most grateful to you for your promptitude and goodness. We hope you will come out to the Warren that she may express her thanks in person. Mrs. Annesley is a great invalid," he added, by way of explanation.

"Oh, really," murmured French, in the tone which we always use to express a certain amount of indifferent sympathy with any form of suffering.

"And you will come out and dine with us one evening?" said the old Colonel, cheerily. He still loved a soldier dearly, and never missed a chance of entertaining one, whenever it was possible; while as for George French, although he was soldier all over—soldier by inclination as well as by profession,—he loathed dining at mess so cordially that he never by any chance refused an invitation to break bread elsewhere.

"I shall be charmed to do so," he said. "And the young lady? I hope she is no worse for the fright."

"Oh, no!" replied the Colonel, easily; "she made very light of it, but admitted that the pony had got beyond her. But she is used to it, and has been among horses of one sort or another ever since she was a baby."

They chatted a little longer, and Colonel Annesley had another glass of sherry ere he departed. "And what night will you come out and dine?" he asked, as he stood holding the young man's hand in his.

"You are very kind—well, practically, any night," he replied.

"Shall we make it to-morrow, then?" the Colonel asked.

"I shall be delighted," said French, cordially.

A Crown of Asphodel.

"Good! Half-past seven for a quarter eight," said the Colonel; "and it is just three miles from door to door."

"I will be there. Good-bye, and many thanks."

When the old soldier had gone away, George French sat down and took up a newspaper. He did not want to read, but he was a popular man, and when he wanted to be quiet he almost always sheltered himself behind a paper, so that such of his comrades as were prowling round on a loose end might be mercifully inclined to go away and leave him in peace.

What a strange thing it was, his thoughts ran, that a fellow could never do anything without having it brought home to him sooner or later—brought distinctly home to him. Now he had almost forgotten the incident of the runaway pony and of the young lady hopelessly tugging at the reins, who had been so profuse in her thanks for the little service he had done her. But these dear people had actually taken the trouble to find him out, just that they might show their gratitude by asking him to dinner. What a queer little world it was, and how glad he was to have found a house in this out-of-the-way district where he could dine sometimes and so escape the tedium of a long dinner at mess, where he knew every joke, every twist and turn in the conversation, every stale old story, and just at what part of

the feast it was likely to be dragged in neck-and-crop!

"I've no doubt the old chap has a fine old crusted lot of tales on hand," he said to himself; "but there, they'll be all new to me, and I can come back to mess and palm them all off on Inglis as being perfectly new and original ones of my own."

He thought a little about the girl whose pony he had stopped then. If he remembered rightly she was rather nice, and not by any means bad-looking. Not pretty—oh, no, certainly not pretty—but young and well-bred, with a charmingly frank manner and a pleasant, well-modulated voice. Quite the kind of girl whom one liked to take in to dinner, or to dance half a dozen times with if the floor was good; but for anything beyond that—well, no.

So the following evening George French dressed himself with much care, and drove himself off to the Warren, where the Annesleys lived. He was not the only guest, for just as he came in sight of the lodge gates, a closed carriage came in the opposite direction and turned in between them. French was not sorry, he was a social soul and loved humanity in the plural, and, if the truth be told, in the feminine gender, and the more people there were at any festivity to which he went, the better pleased he always was.

It seemed to him, when he was ushered into the

drawing-room, that quite a party was gathered together. The Colonel came forward to greet him, and took him to his wife's sofa, and introduced him to her. Then Nannie came forward and said, "How d'you do?" with a laugh and a pleasant little joke about her being a poor little forlorn maiden who could not be trusted outside the door without getting into mischief, and having recourse to the good offices of a chivalrous knight to make things ship-shape again.

This naturally needed explanation to those standing around, and then the whole story was told of how the Chicken had been frightened by a clucking hen, and had taken it into her foolish head to bolt, and run away with her doting mistress. And then, as if to spare the gunner's blushes, dinner was announced, and they all trooped away to the dining-room, followed more slowly by Mrs. Annesley and the most important of the men guests present.

And French enjoyed himself immensely, and got on especially well with Nannie, who sat on his left hand. She amused him out of the common well during the greater part of the time. And as he went home through the dark night, letting the horse find his own way along the dark and unlighted country roads, French said to himself that it was a thousand pities Miss Nannie was not prettier, for she was undoubtedly very bright and amusing.

"Pity she ain't a bit prettier," his thoughts ran. "Pity it is all the plain girl babies are not smothered when they're little. It would simplify things so tremendously." With which heathenish idea in his mind he turned in at the big gates of the fort, and drew up at the door of the officers' mess.

CHAPTER II.

AFTER this George French got into a way of going over to the Warren on all and every occasion. It was natural enough. The Warren was a congenial atmosphere, being the house of a soldier; and Mrs. Annesley, though she was a confirmed invalid, had not been the first lady of a smart cavalry regiment for nothing. If ever a woman understood men of all ages Mrs. Annesley did, and French, somehow or other, got into a way of confiding in her and carrying all his bits of news to her as he would have done to his own mother.

For some months after he had become intimate at the Warren he had not the very smallest idea that Nannie was not the eldest daughter of the house; then, to his surprise one day, she spoke of her sister in a way which told him that she could not possibly mean one of the tall girls who were still in the schoolroom.

"Do you mean one of your young sisters?" he asked.

"No, of course not," Nannie replied. "I mean my eldest sister, Eva. You have not seen her yet because she has been in Canada for more than six months, and won't be back for a month or two yet."

"But," he cried, in amazement, "I had no idea you had an elder sister. How is it you have never spoken of her? Or that you have never shown me her photograph?"

"Out of sight, out of mind, I suppose," said Nannie, with a gay laugh. "And as for a photograph, why, I could not show you that because Eva has never been taken in her life."

"Never been photographed!" he repeated. French was very partial to the process himself, and made an uncommonly good picture too.

"Never; it is one of Eva's little crotchets," answered Nannie, with another laugh. "An odd one, for she is very handsome!"

"I am sure she is," said French, politely—more politely than truthfully, for he did not think any of the Annesley family at all handsome. "By-the-bye, are you going to give me another beating at tennis this afternoon?"

"Yes, if you like," replied Nannie, who would cheerfully have gone for a walk on the roof if French had asked her to do so.

For it must be confessed that Nannie was hopelessly smitten with the big, bronzed gunner;

and while she asked herself many, many times what he could possibly see in her, she yet felt sure—quite sure—that he did see all the world in her grey eyes and in her pleasant, smiling mouth.

And what about French himself? Well, that very easy-going young gentleman thought Nannie Annesley just the very dearest little woman he had ever met in his life. He thought her just the kind of girl who would make a nice, quiet, restful wife for a man, quiet and restful, and yet never dull; for Nannie was very amusing to talk to, and always bloomed out in French's presence like a sunflower in the sunshine. Yes, French had thought it all out, and had argued to himself that, as he was very well blessed with the good things of this world, it was not important that he should, in choosing a wife, do as so many Service men have to do, look first to possessions before the natural charms of the lady to whom he meant to offer himself and his name. And Nannie Annesley was an out-and-out lady, none of your make-believes, such as so many men in the Service get themselves mixed up with. And she was good and true, and—and well, everything that she should be. So George French quite made up his mind that, sooner or later, he would ask Nannie Annesley to marry him.

The old proverb says, "Happy is the wooing that's not long a-doing," and on all accounts it

was a pity, nay, it was a thousand pities that George French's wooing was as long a-doing as it was. For he let things drift and drift, until at last the long-expected elder sister came home, and they met the first time that French went out to the Warren after her arrival in England.

Within a week the mischief was done ; mischief that could never be undone in this world again. For the matter of that, it was done the very first moment that French's eyes fell upon the beautiful face of the eldest Miss Annesley, and in the same moment he forgot that he had fully made up his mind to marry Nannie ; he ignored the fact that he let the days and weeks and months drift over, leaving no doubt about the state of his feelings and intentions toward Nannie ; and he utterly set aside the, to him, much more dishonorable fact that there was no mistake about the feelings of Nannie herself. Yes, it was dishonorable, no one can deny it, but not having actually spoken plainly out to Nannie, George French did what most, or at least what many men in the same circumstances would have done, carried himself precisely as if such an idea as asking Nannie to marry him had never come into his head.

Nannie saw it all—never fear. Trust any girl, really in love, not to know when the man she loves is on the very threshold of forsaking her

for another. And when at length French spoke out to Eva and, having received a consent from her, went to Colonel Annesley and asked for his consent and his blessing, Nannie was quite prepared for the blow, and was equally determined to hold her own and die rather than show any sign of the white feather.

"Why, bless my soul," exclaimed the old Colonel, blankly, when he had fully taken in the idea and the proposal; "you want to marry my eldest daughter? But I—that is, we—at least, we thought, you know, that it was Nannie."

"I have asked Eva to marry me, sir," replied French, reddening a little, in spite of himself.

"Bless my soul!" cried the old Colonel, who adored Nannie himself, and stood in such awe of his beautiful eldest daughter that he really could not understand anyone wanting to marry her. "Well, I suppose you know who you want better than I do. Certainly, I shall be very happy to give my consent if Eva herself approves and wishes it. As to details, I am not rich, but my girls will not go penniless to their husbands when they marry."

"I have enough for both," said French.

So they became engaged, French and Eva Annesley, and congratulations soon poured in upon them in a steady stream from all the country-side.

Now, if French had behaved with scant

thought or consideration to Nannie Annesley, he was yet no coward, and, in order to put their future relations on a clear and proper basis, he went at once in search of her, and, as he thought, broke the news to her himself.

"Won't you wish me joy, Nannie?" he blurted out. "I'm the happiest fellow in the three kingdoms to-day. Eva has consented to marry me, and I do hope you and I will always continue to be the very best of friends, as we have always been."

If Nannie grew a shade or two more white French was far too much excited by the events of the day to notice it, and Nannie was nothing if she was not brave. "I thought something of the kind was going on," she said, in a very bright voice, yet a voice that had the ring of a broken heart in its musical tones. "And I wish you joy with all my heart. I hope you will be very, very happy." She looked him full and fair in the eyes as she spoke, and held out her hand with a gesture that had more of pain in it than if it had been trembling and nervous.

He took it hastily, and with the first touch of compunction that he had shown, or, for the matter of that, felt that day. "Nannie," he said, rather huskily, "I knew you would take this well; I knew you would—" he broke off short then, under the cold, questioning gaze of her grey eyes, and fairly stammered as she looked at him.

"Mr. French," she said, in a tone of great astonishment; "what *are* you speaking of? I am very fond of my sister, of course; but certainly not so devoted as to feel out of friends with you because you are going to take her away from us."

"I was not thinking of that exactly," he muttered, awkwardly; and all the time he was thinking what a pluck she had, and wondering in a dim and groping kind of way if he had not thrown away the substance for the shadow in choosing as he had done.

"Here is Eva," said Nannie at that moment, in a tone of relief; and with a few words of kind wishes to her sister, she slipped quietly away and went into the house.

She had hoped to get into her own room unperceived, but, as she passed through the hall, her mother, from her position on the sofa, caught sight of the blue dress she was wearing, and called her to come to her. "Nannie, is that you?" she said.

"Yes, Mother dear," Nannie answered; her voice was always soft and gentle to her suffering mother.

"Where have you been, darling?" Mrs. Annesley asked.

"Only in the garden."

"Have you seen any of the others?" said Mrs. Annesley, anxiously.

"Yes, I have just left Eva and Mr. French," answered Nannie, steadily.

"Then you have heard?"

"Yes, but," quickly, "I was expecting it; I knew ever so long ago what was coming."

"I hope it will all turn out for the best," said Mrs. Annesley, in a doubtful tone. "I had thought everything would be different, Nannie."

"Yes, but you see," speaking in a studiously matter-of-fact tone, "you cannot arrange these little affairs just as you like, dear Mother. And they will make a very handsome pair, so you will have nothing to grumble at in that respect."

"Handsome is that handsome does," quoted Mrs. Annesley, gravely; for she could not quite forgive her handsome elder daughter for having stepped in and taken Nannie's sweetheart away from her, well knowing that French had been coming to the house for months past with evidently every open and honest intention of eventually asking her to be his wife.

"I think I will go upstairs," said Nannie, who was beginning to feel that her strength would not last out much longer, and that she must get away and be alone if she meant to get through the rest of the day without disgracing herself. "You will be all right, Mother?"

"Yes, dear child, quite," was the reply.

And, at last, poor Nannie got herself away and into the safe and friendly shelter of her

own room, where she passed through an hour of anguish such as comes into the lives of most women and men at one part or other of their passage through this world, which we call the vale of tears.

Meanwhile French had the weight of another interview upon his conscience, for he had not seen Mrs. Annesley since any mention had been made of his marriage with Eva, and, if the truth be told, he felt exceedingly uncomfortable at the prospect of his meeting with her. And when the lovers came in from the garden, and he had no choice but to go and sit down beside her sofa and say something about the great event, she completely chilled him by the few words she had to say about it: "I hope you may both be happy," she said, very quietly; and while he stammered out something that sounded like thanks, the hot blood mounted to George French's cheeks, and that unlucky simile came back to his mind again about the substance and the shadow.

CHAPTER III.

IN due course of time George French and Eva Annesley were made man and wife, after which life at the Warren went on pretty much the same as before—the same, only with a difference. But if Nannie wept sometimes in the

quiet watches of the night, and was a little more quiet and subdued in her general manner, nobody except her mother noticed the change; and Mrs. Annesley knew as well as most people when to speak and when to keep silence.

The bride and groom spent a fortnight of the first long leave they had after they were married at the Warren; but it was not a pleasant time for either the family or the guests. In the first place, the young couple, who had only been married six months, had already begun wrangling, and Eva, who was troubled with no desire to hide the state of her feelings from her own people, said openly that George bored her to extinction, and that she most devoutly wished he had carried out his original intentions and had married Nannie.

In the privacy of their own room she had told French the same thing several times before, and also that she had never cared a straw for him, but had merely married him out of pique, and to show another man that she did not in any way regret him.

"A costly kind of revenge," French said, bitterly, one day, when she gave him this piece of information.

"Yes, that is so," Mrs. French returned, recklessly. "And if I had known how jealous and mean you could be, George, I would have taken some other way of showing it, and would have left you to Nannie."

"Be good enough to leave your sister's name out of your discussions," thundered French, who had grown white to his very lips.

"Pooh! I shall not ask your leave when I speak of my own sister," she sneered.

"Only be quite sure of your facts!" he blurted out, flaring into a sudden outbreak of rage. "I proposed to your sister three days before I proposed to you, and *she refused me.*" He looked her straight in the face as he spoke, and, untruth as it was, his words carried conviction with them.

"To Nannie?" she repeated incredulously.

"Yes, to Nannie. Do you think if I could have got Nannie I would ever have looked at you?"

Without waiting to carry the argument any further, he went hastily out of the room and put an end to the discussion completely. He felt as he walked off up the village street towards the post-office that he had by those words utterly wrecked every chance of happiness that they had ever had. And yet he had saved Nannie at least from pain and insult, and taking the whole wretched past into remembrance he knew that, even at the cost of his life's happiness, it was only her due. Even in the midst of his misery—and he was miserable—there was a grim satisfaction in the knowledge thereof.

But it will be easily understood that a few

conversations such as these did not help to make Mr. and Mrs. George French the most desirable house-guests in the world. Far from it, indeed.

So Nannie, in addition to her own sorrow—and slighted love *is* hard to bear, even for the best and bravest of us—had the torment of seeing the tie, which would have been an everlasting joy to her, become every day more and more of a galling fetter to both of these ill-matched souls, each of whom had trodden the royal road to happiness over the palpitating heart of a loving, living woman.

They went again to the Warren at Easter, more, if the plain truth be told, because there they would be more free of each other's movements than because they wished to see any of the family. To Nannie the visit was a very painful one, for Eva was soured and dissatisfied, and French looked so worn and wretched that she believed he was breaking his heart for love of his wife. Not until the day that French went back to his battery at the end of his ten days' leave did she in any way gather any suspicion of the truth, as it really was, on his side. "I haven't said anything to Eva about it," he said to her, as he took her hand at parting; "but it's quite on the cards that there may be a devil of a row before many weeks are over, and that we may be sent out to Egypt at a moment's notice. And if I am——"

"We will take every care of Eva," said Nannie, eagerly—she always assumed when speaking of them or to them that they were one of the most devoted couples in all the world.

French dropped the hand he held. "Eva will take care of herself," he said, curtly; "I was thinking of something quite different. Nannie," he added, speaking by a great effort; "you know as well as I do that Eva does not care a rap for me, so what is the good of pretending that she does?"

"Yet she married you?" said Nannie, in a voice scarce above a whisper.

"Yes; she married me," he echoed, in a very bitter tone. "Well, that is all over and done now. I threw my best chance of happiness away, and—good-bye, Nannie; think kindly of me sometimes. We all make mistakes now and then, you know. Good-bye, Nannie; God bless you!" and with a close pressure of her hands and a light touch of his lips upon her cheek, he was gone.

The girl stood as if turned to stone just where he had left her. She heard him moving about the hall, heard her father's cheery good-bye and his assurance that they would take every care of Eva. "I know you will," French's voice called back; then the wheels sounded upon the gravel of the drive and he was gone. Nannie shuddered and moved to the fire.

She began to wonder what there had been behind all that he had said. Something, yes, most assuredly something, but what? What? Before she could come to any conclusion, even in her own mind, the door opened and her sister entered the room.

"Has George gone?" she asked.

"Yes, a few minutes ago," Nannie answered.

"Thank goodness for that," was Eva's remark. "What a relief to be rid of him! Ah, my dear, you did very well for yourself when you said no to him. Why did you, by-the-bye? You always seemed to be such friends."

"Why, what do you mean?" Nannie cried.

"Oh, you need not look so innocent—he told me all about it," said Mrs. French, sitting down and resting her smartly-shod little feet upon the fender. "I know that George proposed to you three days before he honored me with a like request, and that you refused him."

"George had no business to tell you anything of the kind," Nannie flashed out.

"No, I dare say not; but he did, you see. I had quite an idea that he had loved and ridden away, but he very promptly set me right on *that* point. I'm sure," she added, "I wish you had said yes."

For a moment Nannie felt as if her head was going to burst, a wild whirl of thoughts came crowding in upon her brain, and then she realized all that had taken place between husband and

wife, and understood that French had taken the shame of having been refused that he might spare her the pain of bearing Eva's sneers at what she believed to be her lovelorn condition. "I don't think we will talk about it any more," she said, simply; and, turning to the breakfast table, began to busy herself among the coffee cups, where a minute or two later she was still occupied when the Colonel came in to breakfast.

* * * * *

A fortnight later the news came that French had been ordered on active service at a few hours' notice, and that if his wife wished to see him before he sailed she must start immediately on receipt of his letter, or else she would be too late.

Mrs. French did so start; not, as she told Nannie, because she was at all anxious to see her husband, but because people would talk so, and think it so queer if she did not do so. And she arrived at Portsmouth, whence he started, just one hour after the troopship had weighed her anchors and steamed out of port, carrying with her the hopes of some hundreds of women, and at least one broken heart.

* * * * *

Within a month from that time came the news of French's death, and after a while there followed a letter from his greatest friend, giving some of the last details, and sending home to the widow a token which had been found on

his dead body. It was a scrap of folded note-paper, and within it lay a little bunch of withered pansies kept in place by a tiny gold-headed pin.

Mrs. French opened the paper and looked at the faded flowers with tear-dimmed eyes, for she had wept copiously from time to time since the news had come, more especially over the remembrance that she had been too late to see him before he sailed. "Put them in the fire," she cried, indignantly, throwing the paper on the table. "I never gave him or anyone else such a ridiculous flower as a pansy in my life. They're a love token from some other woman. I wish I had never seen them."

Nannie turned a shade whiter, as her eyes fell upon the frail, faded things. She knew them again. She had worn them in the bosom of her gown on that last morning, when he had gone away from the Warren, and no one of them had seen him alive again.

*Asphodel! Asphodel! My regrets follow
you to the grave!*

FRED'S ANNIE.

CHAPTER I.

ALTHOUGH she was nearly thirty years old, she knew nothing of the thoughts, feelings, desires and ambitions of the modern woman. What is nowadays derisively called "the new woman" was as a sealed book to her, this Annie of whom I am going to tell. She had hopes and fears, ambitions and desires, it is true, but they were very humble, very feminine—I mean to say of the sort which has been for generations, nay, for centuries, regarded as feminine. Her hopes were that, in time, Fred would get a rise, and that they would then be able to marry and have a home of their own; her fears ran on the same string, and were practically no more than the reverse of her hopes. Her chiefest ambition was to wear a wedding-ring and to be called "Mrs. Fred" by the family, and her whole and sole desire in life was to make a good wife to Fred, to think of him morning, noon and night, to make his way more easy, his career less difficult, in short, to be his willing slave and help-meet, to live and have her

being in and through him—to be first and last, Fred's Annie.

Independence and the suffrage would have had no charm for this exceedingly out-of-date young woman; independence would have implied to her an existence in at least some measure apart from Fred, while as to the suffrage, she had always held that women should have the same political views as their men-folk; and as nobody took the trouble to convert her from this particular form of heresy, she remained in her heathen darkness, and never knew how dark it was. If anybody had told her of the ways and views of the New Woman—had told her that one set of wives thinks it a degradation to bear a husband's name, that another objects to be called Mrs. John Smith and insists on being addressed as Mrs. Eva Smith or Mrs. Anastasia Higgins, I am sure that Fred's Annie would not really have believed that such things could be. To her, poor little soul, to be called Mrs. Fred Stanton was a title of honor, higher than which she had neither expectation nor wish should ever fall to her lot.

To go back a little, Annie Moore was one of several daughters. Her father was something in the City—not that kind of something which runs to mansions in the West End, to men servants and maid servants, to carriages and horses galore, oh, dear no; in this case it meant

a forty-pound house down Fulham way, a servant who is technically described as a "general," a nondescript meal in the evening which is known as "high tea," and a rigid regard as to the expenditure of every penny.

The mother had been more or less of an invalid for years, and Annie had never gone out into the world, as each of the other sisters had done as soon as she left school. You see, Annie was the eldest, the stay-by of the sickly wife, the deputy-mother of the younger ones and the vice-chairman of the domestic board. Younger than Annie was Susie, who was a clever girl, and who went straight on from her school-work into teaching, and, at the time of which I write, was already second mistress of a Board school. A year younger was Florence, commonly known as Florrie; and Florrie had, to use her own words, gone into business. She went away from home at nine in the morning, returning at night in time for tea, and had been known to greatly benefit her friends in the way of bargains in the drapery and millinery lines. After Florrie there came a boy, David, who was just twenty and a clerk in a bank. Then there was a gap of two years, when another boy, Harry, came in turn, and Harry was destined to follow his father's footsteps, and become, like him, a mysterious something in the City. Several years below Harry, was a little girl, by name Violet, who was still at school, and who

had no characteristics ; and, if she had had them, they would in no wise have affected the interests of this story.

So, you see, being the eldest of such a family as this, and having an invalid mother, it was no wonder that Annie had not attempted, in any way, to carve out a path for herself in life. Annie had always had more than enough to do, always. And, moreover, ever since she was nineteen, there had been Fred.

When Annie was nineteen, she and Fred had become engaged to be married. To themselves and to their relatives on both sides such an engagement had seemed a perfectly natural and suitable thing. True, Fred was only a year older than Annie, but he was doing well for his age, and, as he lived at home and was a steady, quiet young fellow, his parents were, on the whole, rather pleased than otherwise to have him settled so early. Therefore, they not only received Annie, but they also expressed their approval in many ways ; and thus, you see, it was soon looked upon as quite a settled thing that she should remain at home to help her mother, and, her future being assured, not trouble to look out for any kind of money-making occupation. Her own father and mother had been engaged for five or six years before they had been able to marry ; and now, looking back from the standpoint of ill-health and the cares of business and the strain of bringing up

a large family, they both regarded the time of courting as one of unalloyed happiness, and saw no reason whatever to object to the marriage on the score of the young couple having to wait until the question of ways and means was pleased to arrange itself in complaisant lines.

And Fred himself was an admirable sweetheart. He spent every moment that he had to call his own in the company of his Annie. He never seemed in any way to grow tired of her ; her interests were his interests, her joys his joys, her sorrows his sorrows. He never forgot any of the little domestic festivities, and they passed bank holidays together, went to the theatre together when time and chance afforded—in short, although they were not married, their lives became bonded together, and Annie was quite justified in gradually learning to have no ideas, hopes, wishes or desires outside the personality of Fred Stanton.

So four pleasant years went by. Fred's Annie was then only three-and-twenty. Fred was still quite a young man, full young to be married, for one who had his own way to make in the world. They had then come within measureable distance of the consummation of their happiness when something dreadful happened—*Fred's people went to smash !*

Not his father and mother—that would not have been altogether so disastrous. No, I

mean the great firm in whose counting-house he held a responsible post, a firm which he had always believed to be as safe as the Bank of England, and in which he had been sure of continuing to find advancement for many years to come, until, indeed, no further advancement could be had save that of a partnership, to which he was not sufficiently sanguine ever to aspire. Well, that was all over now; the old head of the house had sunk down overwhelmed with the shame of failure, and died broken-hearted within three months of the bankruptcy being declared; the entire business had gone to pieces, and there was no one with either money or brains left who could even try to patch things together again. And there remained nothing for the many *employés* of the once great house to do but to go out into the world and seek for bread and cheese elsewhere.

For the honor of the Stanton family, it must be told that, when Fred took the news home, his mother said to him that, with regard to Annie, he had only one course open to him. He must go at once and tell her all, and offer to give her her freedom back again, if she wished to have it. The words fell on poor Fred's hopesick heart like a shower of molten lead; yet he admitted the justice of what his mother said and, taking his hat, he walked round to the Moores' house to do what he conceived to be the right thing before his soul failed him.

"I've been talking things over with Mother," he began, when he and Annie were left alone in the little drawing-room of the house in Aspidestria Road, "and Mother thinks I ought to give you your chance of saying if you don't care to wait any longer for me. Of course, I've saved forty pounds, Annie, but I may be ever so long before I get another billet, and—and——"

"Fred," said Annie, turning very pale and beginning to tremble, "will you answer me one question quite true and plain?"

"Of course I will. Haven't I always been true and plain with you?" he demanded.

"Then, do you *want* me to give you up?" she asked in a piteously anxious voice.

"Oh, Annie!" That was all he said, but the hurt tone conveyed to the girl exactly what she most wanted to know. She trembled no longer, but flung her fond arms about his neck and held him as if not death itself should ever take him away from her.

"Fred—Fred!" she cried. "Don't you understand? Don't you know that it would kill me to part from you? Don't you know that I love you with all my heart and soul—that I have no other, better, higher wish in all my life than to be what I am to you? Don't you know, without my telling you, that I would wait four years more—ten—twenty years, if only you will be content to wait for me?"

How can I tell you the rest? It breaks me down to think of it; it broke down the strong man who had forced himself to do what he believed to be the straight thing towards the girl he loved. He did not speak for ever so long, but he held her tightly in his arms and kissed her a great many times; and when at last he set her free there were tears on her cheeks which were not hers.

"God bless you, Annie; you've made a man of me," he cried, with a suspicious break in his voice which only made him the dearer to her. "If you can wait, I don't mind this break-up, though it's a hard wrench to me. But the very thought of living without you paralyzed me."

"I will wait for ever, if need be," was Annie's answer.

CHAPTER II.

THE following day Fred's mother made a state call upon her son's Annie. Mrs. Stanton was a lady who did not go out much. She went to a place of worship on Sundays if the weather was fine, and she now and then made a few state calls, visits of condolence or of congratulation. Her visit to Annie, however, differed from either of these.

"I have always been most careful not to interfere with my children's affairs," she explained

to Annie, and to the invalid, Mrs. Moore. "I never cared for my own mother-in-law; in fact, she poisoned the first few years of my married life, and I don't mean to do the same with my sons and daughters-in-law, not if I can help it. So I came on to see you about what I said to Fred yesterday. When he told me the bad news—that his people were done for, with no hope of ever getting right again—I told him what was in my mind: that he ought to give you the chance of saying if you cared to wait any longer or not. Of course, I saw that Fred wasn't very willing; but it falls hard on a girl if she has to wait and wait, with no prospects. But lor, there, my dear, Fred told me what you said; and while Maria Stanton lives you shall never want a true friend. Those that stick to my bairns, I stick to; and I only wish Pa and me had a few hundred pounds to let you start and take your chance at once, that I do."

"Oh, Mrs. Stanton!" cried Fred's Annie, the tears coming into her sweet blue eyes, and a rosy flush over-spreading her pretty face.

"Aye, that I do, my dear," the motherly old lady went on. "But, there, never mind, the time'll soon pass; and when it's gone, it'll seem like a few days. I know."

So the approval of Fred's family was set on the continuance of the engagement between them, and things went on pretty much as they had done aforetime. And after this began a

period of great tribulation for both ; for times were bad, and billets were almost impossible to get, and month after month went by without Fred being able to get employment of any kind. Not for want of trying, poor fellow ; he tramped London over till he tramped the boots off his feet, but he could hear of nothing in any way suitable for his powers. More than once he spoke of emigrating, but his father told him that it would be a really silly course, that it was not as if he had a good trade at his back, and that clerks were next to no good in new countries. " You know, my lad," said Mr. Stanton, with much good sense, " if I were well off, I would say, ' Go out and try your luck in a new country ; ' only, as it is, though you could get out, and might do well, yet you have just as likely a chance of doing no good at all, and then where would you be ? You would just be stuck there, with no means of getting home, and we could not afford to send it to you. No, no ; better the devil you do know than the devil you don't—and that's been my motto always."

Fred Stanton could not but acknowledge the truth of what his father said. Besides that, he knew that he was welcome to a home as long as the home held together, while the moment that he went away from the paternal roof he would have to pay for every fraction of his expenses, and that, at this juncture, would

mean a considerable difference in his outgoings. So he struggled on, and at last success came to him, as success mostly does to those who really try their best to win that difficult guerdon in this life. He got a berth in a shipbroker's office, at a very small salary—one at which he would have scoffed in days gone by. Still, Fred Stanton was sensible, and took what he could get, until the time should come when he could meet with something better worth having.

Annie was jubilant. "Something tells me that this is the turn of the corner, Fred, darling," she cried, when he went to tell her the good news. "You will soon get on again, and we shall not have to wait so very long, after all."

"And if we have to?" asked Fred, holding her close to him.

"Why, then we shall have to, that's all," cried she, laughing back at him.

So time went on. The something better did not turn up, but, in due course, Fred got a rise, coupled with a compliment from his employer to the effect that he was very well satisfied with him. True, it was not much of a rise, all said and done; still, a rise, be it ever so small, *is* a rise, and Fred and Annie rejoiced accordingly. Fred celebrated the event by taking Annie to a theatre—to reserved seats—a terrible piece of extravagance, the like of which they had not committed since the break-up of his old firm.

And the next time they went out together they spent a long time in the Edgware Road, looking into the shop windows, and deciding what sort of furniture they would have when they were able to set up housekeeping at last.

Annie never thought of applying to any one of the clever ladies who help young house-furnishers through their troubles by instructing them, through the columns of a ladies' paper, what to buy and where to buy it. Oh dear, no; as I have said, Annie was a very out-of-date young woman, and would not have delegated the sweet pleasure of arranging her first home—hers and Fred's—to anyone else for all the world.

In due course of time Fred got another rise, together with another compliment from the shipbroker; also a pretty plain hint that, if he went on doing as well as he had done in the past, there would be still better things in store for him. And then something very unusual happened—Mr. Schwartz actually invited him to dinner.

The House was amazed. Hitherto, no one under the rank of head of a department had been accorded such an honor.

"I shall have to get a dress suit," said Fred to Annie, when he had told her the news.

"But it will be worth it," cried Annie, all in a tremor at his unexpected good-fortune.

"Yes, I suppose so. All the same, I don't

feel particularly pleased at the prospect," Fred grumbled. "I don't belong to their set, and I don't know their ways; and I dare say the rest of the people will look down upon me, and I object to be looked down on."

"Nobody could look down on you," flashed out Annie in great indignation.

"Oh, couldn't they?" returned Fred, laughing at her anger.

"Have you ever seen Mrs. Schwartz?" she asked presently.

"There isn't one—she's dead long ago," he replied. "There is a daughter, but, I fancy, no other children at all."

"Have you ever seen her?" Annie inquired.

"Oh, yes; she is always coming to the office. She comes to fetch her father—the boss."

"And what is she like? Nice?"

"Pretty fair. A great big, bold-looking young woman, with great black eyes, and awfully over-dressed. 'Put me my cloak on, Mr. Stanton. Oh, thanks, ever so many—thanks, that's quite charming'—that's about the sort of thing; and, of course, the governor thinks her perfect. The invitation is from her."

"Oh, do let me see it," Annie cried.

He took it out of his pocket-book and gave it to her. It was highly scented, and bore a flourishing crest.

"DEAR MR. STANTON,—It will give my father and myself much pleasure if you will join us at dinner on Friday, the 10th, at eight o'clock.

"Very truly yours,

"BARBARA SCHWARTZ."

"It doesn't say much," said Annie, in a tone of disappointment. "Still," with a sigh, "I suppose she could not have said more. And they live in Queen's Gate, Fred?"

"Yes," said Fred, who was wondering how he could find out whether he ought to wear gloves or not.

"You don't know what it may lead to," Annie went on breathlessly, already looking into the future so far that she saw them living in Queen's Gate likewise.

"No; still, I wish it was over," Fred replied feelingly.

And, in due time, the dinner did pass over. The other people consisted of one old gentleman, to whom Mr. Schwartz talked all the time, leaving Fred to entertain, and be entertained by, his daughter. And Miss Barbara made every effort to make Fred feel quite at home with them, and succeeded so well that he went away feeling that he had not made a single slip, and that the two shillings which he had expended on an etiquette book had not been money wasted.

He dined many times at the Schwartzes after this—nay, more, he went there to dances and

evening receptions, at which the company was very well dressed, and many diamonds were shown, and money was evidently of no moment. Of course, he had to spend to live up to it, so that the savings which were to furnish his home and Annie's some day gathered more slowly and the wedding day seemed further off than ever. And at last, when he and Annie had been engaged for more than ten years, when Annie was nine and twenty—for the matter of that, nearly thirty—and beginning to look less of a girl than she had once done, and Fred was every day improving more and more, having acquired a more gentlemanlike and assured manner from his altered life, Mr. Schwartz sent for him into his office, and told him that he was exceedingly pleased with him, and that he proposed to give him a substantial proof of the same, adding that, from that day he would have a salary of four hundred a year, with a prospect of even better things in time to come. "You will come and dine with us to-night, Stanton?" the great man ended.

"Certainly, sir; I shall be delighted to do so," Stanton replied. "At the usual time?"

"No, we dine at seven; my daughter has a box for the opera. She particularly wished me to ask you."

Stanton looked at the clock which stood on the chimneyshelf. "I have a good deal to do. If you will excuse me, sir, I will go. I can't

thank you enough for all your kindness to me. I only hope that I shall prove worthy of the trust you have placed in me."

"I feel pretty sure about that," said the chief kindly.

He was a very busy man, but he sat for quite half an hour, thinking, after Stanton had left the room. "A clever fellow; I don't know that Bab might not do worse; and yet—well, there may be nothing in it; but she has set her heart on the young fellow's being pushed on; and, after all, what have I but Bab to live for? I began with nothing myself; and I don't know if I wouldn't rather have my girl confer the favors than have her marry high and be looked down on, as I was. However, she may mean nothing of the kind. Time will show—time will show."

Meantime, Fred had gone back to his desk, with his brain in a whirl, and his heart beating much faster than usual. It was enough to excite any one in his position; but he was a resolute young man, and he set about the work he had in hand, and finished it conscientiously ere he left the office. By then, however, he found that he had but barely time to get home and dress for the evening's entertainment, and that by no possibility could he make time to run round to Aspidestria Road to tell Annie the good news.

"I say, Connie," he said to his sister, as he

reached his own house, "I'm in a deuce of a hurry. Just sew me this button on and bring it up to my room, there's a good girl; I've got something to tell you."

By the time Connie had sewn the button in its place and reached her brother's room, Fred was already half dressed. "Look here, Connie," he said, as he tied his tie into a neat bow, "I want you to go round and see Annie. Tell her I can't come round to-night as I promised, because I've got to dine at the governor's and to go to the opera with them afterwards. Tell her I wouldn't have let it come from another but me if I could have helped it, but I've got another rise—four hundred a year, and the prospect of more to come; so the way is quite clear for us now, and I don't like her to be a single day without the news."

"Four hundred a year!" cried Connie Stanton, with what was almost a scream, "and going to the opera with them. Fred, this must be Miss Schwartz's doing."

"Not unlikely," said he indifferently. "Only you don't find a hard-headed old chap like Schwartz doing that kind of thing unless his own judgment goes hand in hand with his daughter's impulses. Miss Schwartz is a very nice girl, but——"

"Pooh, nice! Why, you might marry her to-morrow if you liked, if it wasn't for Annie."

"Ah, but there is Annie, you see," put in Fred with a smile.

"But think of it—an heiress!" screamed Connie, who was older than Fred, and had never had a romance in all her life.

"Oh, d——" but he broke the word off short, and turned away from the dingy glass. "Then you'll see Annie and explain just how it is?" he said.

"Oh, yes, I'll explain," returned Connie ungraciously.

* * * * *

Annie Moore was sitting in the little drawing-room waiting for her Fred. She was dressed in her poor best—yes, I say poor advisedly, for in truth, though she had made sundry attempts at beautifying herself, Fred's Annie was distinctly shabby. She looked up with a smile as her future sister-in-law came into the room. "Oh, is that you, Connie? Is anything wrong with Fred?"

"Fred has gone to dine at Queen's Gate," replied Connie, taking a chair and regarding Annie with no very friendly eyes. "There are great doings on to-night, for Mr. Schwartz has just told Fred that he means to give him another rise. He had to go, of course."

"Oh, of course," echoed Annie rather faintly, thinking that Fred might have come round to tell her the news.

"Has it ever struck you, I wonder, Annie,"

Connie went on relentlessly, "that there is something between our Fred and Miss Schwartz?"

"Between Fred and Miss Schwartz!" cried Annie.

"Doesn't it seem queer to you that he should have been pushed on like he has been," the pitiless voice continued; "asking him to dinner, taking him to the opera and such-like, if there wasn't some meaning to it?"

"Do you mean that Miss Schwartz is in love with Fred?" Annie exclaimed, all the blood in her slender body seeming to rush to her face. "Do you mean that if I was out of the way Fred would—would——" but she could not say the hateful words, which to her pure mind seemed like an insult to her sweetheart, even though they had not actually been uttered.

"I told Fred as much just now," Connie went on; "and I said she was in love with him. He never denied it. Indeed, he said as much that, if it wasn't for you——"

"Did Fred commission you to get him out of his promise to me?" cried Annie in a harsh voice. "Speak out plain—don't beat about the bush."

"Fred isn't that sort," said Connie with a sudden accession of dignity. "Fred'll do the right thing by you, Annie, never fear. Still, your own common sense must tell you that it's a chance in a thousand for him, and he's got to miss it because of you."

"A chance in a thousand," repeated Annie in a dazed way.

She sat there long after Connie Stanton had betaken herself away, thinking it all over. Yes, Connie was right; it was a chance in a thousand. And surely Fred must have grown a little tired of her, or would have made time just to look in and tell her the news and to make his excuses; surely, yes. Oh! it was bitter—bitter—bitter that this rich girl should sail in and take her own love away from her. Yes, it was bitter, but—she would not stand in Fred's light.

"Mother," she said presently, "I am going for a little stroll. If Fred comes in I've left a note for him. Good night, dear; you'll go to bed early, won't you?"

"Yes, I shall not be late," the mother replied. "Go for your walk, dear. I'll tell Fred if he comes."

It happened that Fred did call at Aspidestria Road that evening. Things do happen strangely in this world, and among other things which came about that very day was the engagement of Barbara Schwartz to a young man who had been a very frequent visitor at Queen's Gate for several months past. When Fred reached his destination he found only Mr. Schwartz in the drawing-room, who plunged at once headlong into the subject.

"Stanton, I have some news to tell you. My daughter is going to be married."

"Indeed, sir," replied Fred, "I am delighted to hear it. I hope Miss Schwartz will be very happy. Thanks to your kindness, I hope very soon to be married myself." And truly he was surprised at the strangely hearty way in which the older man wrung his hand.

A little while later, Mr. Schwartz, finding himself near to his daughter, whispered the news to her.

"Dear old dad," she said; "I've known it all along. That was why I urged you on so to do something for him."

"But you let me think—" the old man cried.

"Yes, I know," with a mischievous laugh, "you wouldn't have done it else."

Towards the end of the meal she contrived to whisper to Fred, "Mr. Stanton, what does she say?"

"I haven't seen her yet. I sent her a message, because I couldn't bear her not to know——"

"Oh, wouldn't you rather not go with us to-night?" And Fred looked at her.

Thus it came about that he was free to go straight down to Aspidestria Road to talk over the golden news with Annie. And Annie's mother met him with the information that she had gone out for a stroll, but had left a note

for him in case he should come. And this was what it said :

"MY OWN DARLING,—Connie has told me all that has happened to you, and she let out—don't blame her—that there is a chance of a partnership and a marriage with this heiress. My dear love, how could you be the one to think that I would ever stand in your light? Connie is quite right; it is a chance in a thousand; so, as I know you would never turn your back on me, and as life without you would not be worth living, I am going to make the way clear for you. Good-bye, my own darling! Good-bye!"

With a terrible cry, Fred flung the paper from him and dashed out of the house. He knew but too well where to go. He knew the very spot that she would be sure to seek. Had they not walked together along the river's bank only a few short weeks before, and did not Annie say to him that it was an ideal place in which to let one's life slip away; that it would be so easy—just a step forward and all would be over in a few minutes? Ah, the words, so idly spoken, yet fraught now with such terrible meaning, seemed to be beating themselves in on his brain as if they would fain impress their hateful significance indelibly upon his mind. He rushed down the quiet street and ran in the direction of the river, tearing blindly at racing speed through the still summer air. As he gained the turn by which you can reach the pathway which skirts the

grounds of the Palace, he sent a great cry along the echoing water—"ANNIE! ANNIE!"

Like a madman he tore along, calling every minute or so and keeping an eager watch ahead, but no answering cry came back to him. Then something like a bundle almost at the water's edge attracted him, and he dashed down the bank to where it lay. Oh, God be thanked! God be thanked! it was Annie who lay there; he was in time, for it was a fainting woman, not a dead one, whom he clasped in his arms and besought by every passionate term of love to speak to him, to understand that she was everything, *everything* to him, both in this world and in time to come.

"Annie! Annie!" he cried. "Look at me! Speak to me!"

"I heard you calling," she said in a tone of ineffable satisfaction, when she had come back to herself again; "I heard you calling me out of Hell into Heaven."

A SCARBOROUGH LOVE STORY.

ON the whole, the London season had been a very bad one. The weather had been broken, the Court was in mourning, trade was at its lowest ebb. People who were in the habit of giving a dozen large entertainments during that intermittent fever which we call "the season" contented themselves with two; people who usually gave two gave one, and cut down the refreshments at that; people who were in the habit of giving one, put that one off until the following year, and broke the information to their friends with vague but, at the same time, somewhat dark hints about a celebrated bank, which had been in difficulties about a year or two previously, although, if the truth be told, they had no more connection with that particular house of business than they had with the National Bank of North China, or Timbuctoo, or Greenland. Towards the end of the season, a Royal wedding helped things a little, but it was but a flicker in the candlestick, and when it was over, the festivities went out, and society people talked about the sad state of

their health after influenza, and the stern necessity that rest and quiet had become to them. It was the same on all hands. Many of those people who had driven a pair of horses contented themselves with one; those who had been accustomed to require the services of a first and second footman, besides an irreproachable person in evening dress who sauntered round and made things comfortable, now contented themselves with a single-handed parlor-maid, and the rent of flats went up in an extraordinary manner.

It was the saddest London season that had been known for many years. Depression, retrenchment, and, as a natural consequence, poverty and distress were heard of on every side. Yet even a bad season had always some bright spots, and everybody who was anybody in London thought and said that Airlie Frewen was one of the luckiest girls who had ever lived. Of course, she was very pretty, and she was a very charming girl, and her mother was the Honorable Mrs. Frewen, which of course gave Airlie a place which mere money would not have given. Still, the fact was painfully apparent that Mrs. Frewen had no money to speak of. She was a handsome woman, barely middle-aged, a widow, and her income was distinctly apocryphal. Nobody, not even Mrs. Frewen's nearest relations, knew how she managed things as she did. Time had been,

years ago, during Airlie's childhood, when she had been quite well off, but a large portion of her husband's income had died with him, and on the remnant that was left Mrs. Frewen contrived to do wonderful things—to keep a natty little flat in a fashionable part of town, and a lady's maid. We need not go into details as to the other domestic service of the establishment. It was not showy, though distinctly useful, but the maid was an indisputable fact, and Mrs. Frewen never paid a visit without taking Louise along with her. Occasionally Airlie paid a visit without her mother, but Airlie always took Louise unless the house at which she was visiting was too unimportant to be impressed thereby.

And Airlie was very pretty. It was on such a visit as I have described, that she had the good fortune to meet with Lord Mervyn. Lord Mervyn was in the habit of saying that he had had the good fortune to meet with Airlie—but that is a nicety which the reader can arrange to his own liking. Certain is it, that after three days spent together down at a beautiful country house in the Midlands, Lord Mervyn called at the little flat in South Kensington that he might make the acquaintance of Miss Frewen's mother.

It was a tiny mite of a place, containing a rather nice drawing-room and a much smaller dining-room, a bedroom apiece for the mother

and daughter, a diminutive bath-room, and a box apiece for each of the servants. In order to give the estimable Louise a sanctuary of her own—the only concession for which she held out—Mrs. Frewen had been obliged to sacrifice what, in the ordinary course of events, would have constituted her boudoir. However, it was a sacrifice which she had made willingly, feeling that Louise had sacrificed much for her sake. As I have said, it was a very pretty flat, though small, and Lord Mervyn became a constant visitor thereto, a very charming visitor—a visitor who sent flowers and other offerings of the earth with unfailing regularity, who brought all the newest books of note, and paid many other pleasant attentions, and at last he suggested that Airlie Frewen should exchange her mother's tiny flat for the several residences which called him master.

Of course, she never hesitated. Lord Mervyn was not only very much in love with her, very rich, and an exceeding charming person, but he was also young and remarkably good-looking, and Airlie, who was not a mercenary girl in the remotest sense of the word, said "Yes," willingly and with all her heart.

"You know, I feel," she said to him one day, when he had come as usual to take her into the Park, "I feel, somehow, that I have known you always."

"That is because you are really fond of me,"

said Mervyn, holding her hand and looking at her with his heart's love shining out of his handsome eyes. "You know, I have a theory that we have all lived before, and that we shall all live again. Depend upon it, dearest, you and I have been married over and over again, and this is only a sort of scene in the drama of creation."

"But I think I must have seen you this time," said Airlie, looking at him in a puzzled way; "I feel that I know you quite well, and yet, we never met before we were together at Claydons, did we?"

"No, if I had ever seen you before in this world I certainly should have noticed you, because," he went on, "the moment I saw you come into the drawing-room at Claydons, I said to myself 'There she is! I am going to marry that girl.' I never believed before," Lord Mervyn went on reflectively, "in that kind of thing really happening to anyone. I have heard other fellows say it; I have seen it in books, but I have never believed it."

"But when you saw me—?" she began.

"When I saw you," he answered, "I felt that I was done for. I felt that everybody else seemed to pale before you. It was most extraordinary. It was as if the light of stars had suddenly gone out and left one sun shining more brilliantly than I had ever seen a sun shine in all my life."

Well, you know, dear reader, these two were young, and they were very much in love with each other and although I could go on and fill all the pages of this volume with their pretty rhapsodies, it would not suit either my purpose or yours, because I have a story to tell which I hope you want to hear. They *did* rhapsodize a little, and then they went into the Park, and then they went back to lunch, and later in the day they did some shopping together; in fact, they followed the usual round of a thoroughly happy engagement, and in the last week of July they were married, and so far as human judgment could portend, were made happy for all time.

Everybody said that it was the prettiest wedding not only of that season, but of many which had gone before it. Mrs. Frewen gave the wedding-breakfast at an hotel, and, most becomingly dressed, wept a little as her only child was taken away from her, amid showers of flowers, rice, old slippers, and hundreds of good wishes.

"No, I am not going to cry," she said, "I am not going to cry. I am too thoroughly delighted with my son-in-law, and too assured of my dear girl's happiness to feel more than just the pang of the moment. It is all over. I am not going to cry at all. It would be utterly selfish if I did," and so she resolutely dried her eyes, said good-bye to her many guests, and

quietly superintended the packing of the shoals of presents which Airlie had received.

Well, the newly-married pair went straight down to Claydons, which had been lent to them by its owner for the first week of their honeymoon. It was a pretty romance—going back together to the house where they had met as complete strangers little more than three months previously, but if the truth be told, they found Claydons, delightful as it had been for a large party, a little dull when occupied only by themselves. For a whole week it rained. True, Lady Mervyn, protected by a big ulster, braved the elements every day and took long drives or walks with her husband ; but the neighborhood was strange to both of them, they knew none of the neighbors, and naturally those who were intimate with the owners of Claydons did not think of intruding upon the first married bliss of a happy young couple. They had promised to go to Mervyn Towers in August, and to go up to Mervyn's Scotch estate some time during September, and I may as well confess that they both looked forward with not a little dismay to the prospect of several weeks spent in this terrible state of isolation in which they were left at Claydons. You see, they were both sociable young people. Airlie at twenty and Mervyn at thirty-one were still young enough to love their kind. It is your lovers who have waited long for the consummation of their hap-

piness who find perfect solitude the most desirable form of bliss, who are all in all to each other from morn to dewy eve. These two were perfectly happy in their marriage, but they both longed to see people, to have a good time, to have it *together* it is true, but, still, to have it; and at the end of that first week at Claydons, Mervyn suddenly proposed to his wife that they should betake themselves away from the solitary grandeur of this great country house and go out and enjoy themselves at Scarborough or some such place, without saying a word to anybody.

They departed from Claydons the very next day for Scarborough, and the following evening saw them dining as gaily as a couple of children in the handsome dining-room at the great hotel on the South Cliff which is known as "The Crown."

"What do you feel inclined to do to-night? Will you go out and listen to the music?" he said to her, when they had nearly finished dinner.

"Oh, yes, it is a lovely night. I won't be two minutes putting something on. I should enjoy it beyond everything. Fancy, how lovely having music to listen to—a regular band and all that, after sitting out those evenings at Claydons, yawning and wondering when it would be time to go to bed. Oh—h! *Didn't* you get tired of it?"

"I didn't get tired of you."

"No, I don't suppose you got tired of me, of course not; but, oh dear, how dull it was! You know, Mervyn, sugar is very nice, but when you get a cup of tea that is all sugar—oh, it does take such a lot of drinking. Upon my word, a whole week in that great, empty, echoing house, in which we were really quite strange, in which we hadn't, so to speak, found out the comfortable corners or the easy-chairs, or anything, it was horrid! We ought to have gone home to Mervyn at once. We should not have been dull there, because it would have been your own house. Whenever we get married again, we'll never accept the loan of a house from anybody."

"We won't," said Mervyn, with conviction.

"Ah," she went on, "it was like trying to eat a pot of honey without anything to eat with it. The first spoonful or two are very nice, but when you are getting towards the bottom of the pot—oh!"

"I don't believe," said he, looking across the little table at her with a quizzical expression, "young woman, I don't believe that you care a brass farthing for me."

"Oh, yes, you do. You know exactly how much I care for you, but you know you were just as much oppressed by the weight of the place as I was. Well, I will go up and get my coat on, and we'll go and sit out on that lovely

cliff, and watch all the lights down below and listen to the band."

"Won't you go down on the front?"

"Would you? To-night? We may see somebody we know. Don't you think we had better keep that till to-morrow. Don't you think that it is change enough to have a band to listen to and lights to look at, instead of watching the mists rise—rise—rise, and listening to the peacocks screaming and the owls hooting as we had to do at Claydons? After all, you know, dear, the mists and the peacocks and the owls were quite the best that Claydons had to offer us in the way of delectation."

Lord Mervyn laughed outright. "What a funny child you are! You are quite right though; it *was* dull, and it gave me a feeling of dampness all round. Well, let us go out."

A few minutes later they passed out through the hall of the hotel and sauntered together on the broad promenade which runs along the entire length of the South Cliff.

"Now, here is a seat," said Airlie, who was holding his arm; "this will just suit us. We can sit here and listen to the music and the dashing of the tide against the foreshore and be very happy until it is time to go in again."

Unfortunately, however, there were drawbacks even to this form of Paradise. There were other wanderers who wanted to listen to the music and the breaking of the waves on

the foreshore below, there were other couples who thought that seat a very charming retreat from the world, and presently she looked at him in the brilliant starlight and whispered, "don't like this. Let us go on."

"Look here," he answered, "if you don't want to go down on to the Spa, let us go a little way down the gardens until we come to a seat nobody wants to share with us," and to this she joyfully acceded.

They had to walk a little way before they came to an entrance into the Spa Gardens, whose shrubs and terraces cover the entire face of the cliff, and by whose zigzag footpaths you may reach the gaily-lighted promenade below. Here and there, as you ascend or descend, there are resting places for those who don't want to join the giddy throng, nor yet to leave the gardens—small plateaus or corners adjoining the walks, and containing just room for a rustic seat, and guarded from danger by a bit of rustic railing. It was in one of these retreats that Lord Mervyn and Airlie ensconced themselves.

"We are pretty free from any chance of any one wanting to share *this* seat," said he, as he sat down beside her, "and it is better than the top of the cliff, because it is less boisterous. Nothing could well be more sheltered, and how jolly it all looks in this perfect starlight! Look," he said, holding his hand out towards

the left, "those lights are on the top of the old Castle cliff. We must drive up there and see it. It is as interesting as anything in Scarborough, and it blows enough to blow your very head off, which, in this weather, is a great advantage."

"My dear old boy," said Airlie, "I have been to Scarborough before."

"Have you, really?"

"Why, of course I have. I was here long ago, when I was quite a child—oh, years and years ago. Still I remember it quite well. I have been up to the Castle many a time. By-the-bye, Mervyn, when were you here last?"

"I was here about three years ago, just before I came into the title. Before that I hadn't been to Scarborough for six or seven years. Then I remember so well—why, Airlie, I have never told you what happened to me in Scarborough about ten years ago."

"No."

"Well," he said, slipping his arm round her waist under cover of the darkness, "I will tell you the only bit of real romance that ever came into my life until one evening when you walked into the drawing-room at Claydons three months ago. I was then quartered at York. You know, my people went and put me into a cavalry regiment, which I had no possible means of living up to creditably. My father was a younger son; my mother had had but a

very modest fortune, which came to me when I came of age. I don't know what possessed my poor father, I am sure, but when I was nineteen I was gazetted into the Royal Greys. When I look back and realize that I had then no prospect whatever of succeeding my uncle, who had three sons of his own, no prospect of having more than my mother's little fortune, which wasn't worth consideration as a provision for going into one of the most expensive regiments in the Service, that my father was a comparatively poor man, and that the greater part of his income came from an official appointment, I really think that he must have been out of his mind. However, I was very young; I was very foolish; I never counted the cost; and when I was gazetted to the Royal Greys, I joined and I went the pace exactly as I saw all the other fellows doing. The result was that by the time my poor mother's money came to me it was all forestalled. I paid up my debts, which was to my credit, though perhaps I say it as shouldn't, and I found myself with just a hundred pounds and my pay. The rest was all gone. I don't know what excuse I gave, but, at all events, about that time I got a few days' leave, and I came here to spend it. I came that I might have those few days to think over what I would do in time to come, to think over the wreck I had made of my past, and try to determine what it was possible for me to do

with my future. I was quite alone ; I was a mere boy—only one-and-twenty. I had a hundred pounds in the bank, my horses, my dog cart, my furniture, and such-like things, all of them put together worth next to nothing, and here I spent ten days. I knew very few people then. I didn't see a soul I knew in Scarborough—not one, and I only made one acquaintance during the whole time that I was here."

" And that," said Lady Mervyn, " was a woman ? "

" That," he corrected, " is a woman now, if she is alive. That one friend I made was a child. Her name I have never known. I fancy her little friends call her Babs, but somehow I never asked her. I used to see her every day. She was a pretty child—she was something the sort of child that I could fancy you were. I don't know how we became acquainted. It came so. I used to sit here on these cliff seats and my little friend used to come and talk to me, and one day she said to me—' I believe you are very sorry about something. What is the matter ? ' Now, you will think me foolish, dearest, but remember I was very lonely ; I had no mother, no sister, my poor father had no more sense than to put me into the one career which was bound to ruin me, being such a young fellow as I was. I knew nobody in Scarborough, and, somehow, this little child

seemed to creep into my heart and I told her not everything, not that I had gambled and squandered my money right and left like young idiot, not that I had done things that would have been ashamed to tell to her innocent ears, no, but I told her that I was ruined and that I had chiefly myself to blame for it, that I was very poor, and that I could not make up my mind how to make the best of my life. She was a grave little soul, and she was pathetically interested in my story of my woes. 'What would *you* do, little woman,' I asked her, 'if you had made a hash of everything in your past, and you didn't know which way to turn for a friend in the present? What would you do with your life?'

"She was just going to answer me when her maid came in search of her. She jumped on to her feet in a moment. 'There is my maid,' she said; 'I must go, because I think it is tea-time, but if you are down at the Spa to-morrow, in the morning, I will tell you exactly what I think,' and then she gave me her hand and disappeared, while I swear to you, darling, I sat as it might be on this seat and laughed aloud to think of myself being reduced to telling a little stranger-girl of the trouble I was in. And yet, do you know, I felt better for that child's friendliness, for her friendship, for the interest in her pathetic eyes, and her innocent conviction that when we met again she would be able to

show me a way out of my difficulties. Well—Why, Airlie, darling, you are not jealous of my little girl friend of long ago, are you?" he said, turning and looking at her in the soft star-lit night.

Lady Mervyn smiled. "No, but I am very much interested," she said. "I want to hear the rest."

"It is soon told," said Lord Mervyn, holding her very closely to him. "I *did* go in search of her the next morning, and she told me in her grave child's voice that she had been thinking about me a great deal, and she said: 'I have brought you something which I want you not to open until this evening, because I am going away this afternoon—I am going home to London—but if you will put this in your pocket and open it at night when you have eaten your dinner, you will find my answer written there.'"

"Yes?" said Lady Mervyn.

"I *did* wait until evening," he went on, "and then I opened with a good deal of curiosity the little packet that she had brought me. I found just a silver sixpence. One side of it had been smoothed away, and on it was written 'Gang for'ard!' I have never seen her since."

For a moment there was absolute silence between them. Then Airlie Mervyn looked up at her husband—"I am going to surprise you very much," she said softly; then after an instant's pause, she added—"I was that child!"

JEANNE'S MARRIAGE.

CHAPTER I.

A GOOD many people in Blankhampton wondered why she had been called Jeanne. You see in that old, old city it was very much the custom at the time when Jeanne Power was born to always call babes after the members of their family who had flourished before them. I have known a family in Blankhampton which had no fewer than five Deborahs among its younger branches. There was, or rather there had been, the original grandmother, a daughter of an old county family, who had married not exactly beneath her, but into a family which prided itself somewhat on the alliance. She had had several daughters, and each of those had married and become the mother of a flourishing family, as was also the case with the sons. No, no, I don't mean that the sons had become the mothers of flourishing families, but that they too had taken to themselves partners for life, and that their unions had been blessed with a goodly number of young people, and in every house there was to be found a girl who bore the name of her grandmother—Deborah.

There was Deborah in St. Thomas' Street, Deb on the Moor, Deborah Jane and Deborah Annie. In the same generation was a Deborah Catherine, a Catherine Annie, a Catherine Jane, and a Jane Annie. And what is more, they were one and all called familiarly by their double names.

Now this is by no means an unusual instance of nomenclature in the old city of Blankhampton. And although the custom is dying out now, it was still in full force when Jeanne Power was an infant just three and twenty years before the time of which I am writing. And Blankhampton, or at least that portion of it which was on visiting terms with the father and mother of the child, expressed itself greatly surprised at the name which had been bestowed upon her.

"You perhaps have a French aunt, dear Mrs. Power?" one lady said to her the day after the baby had been christened.

"No," returned Mrs. Power. "I have no aunts of any kind."

"But you must have some reason for giving the baby such an outlandish name—at least, I mean such an unusual name."

"None at all of the kind you mean. We have not called baby after anyone. I was called after my two grandmothers—Sophia Martha. I always determined that no child of mine should writhe under such horrible names as those. Now my mother's name was For-

tune, and my husband's mother was called Penelope. Could I have called my poor little girl Fortune Penelope? I ask you now."

"You must have had other female relations," suggested the lady, whose own name of Almira she had unhesitatingly handed down to her daughter, with the elegant addition thereto of Arabella.

"Yes, but their names, poor dears, were all hideous. So we called baby by the prettiest name we could think of. After all, what could one have sweeter than Jeanne? It is so soft and gentle-sounding. I delight in it. And she is to be called Jeanne every day. I will have no silly nursery names—no Cissies or Poppets or anything of that kind. Jeanne she is named and Jeanne she shall be called."

As the babe had already been christened it was quite useless to carry the discussion further. But from that time Mrs. Power was always voted as being somewhat queer in her ideas, and the circumstance of her only child's name was remembered in a measure against her in days that came after.

So Jeanne Power grew up from a babe into a fine sturdy child, and later into a tall slip of a girl, not exactly pretty yet with a bright and winsome face and a laugh like a peal of fairy bells. Everybody who knew Jeanne liked her. Everybody who saw her made the same remark—"What a charming girl."

But fate had ordained that life was not to be all sunshine for Jeanne Power. Until the time when she was nearly seventeen her life had been all sunshine. Scarcely a single dark ray had even seemed likely to cross her horizon. She was accounted one of the lucky ones who knew not disappointment and sorrow, and the very name of Jeanne Power stood as a synonym for all that was bright and joyous. Then all at once, in a moment everything was changed. Jeanne's father died suddenly, and the entire position of affairs was altered. Jeanne's bright days were over. Her mother, from the awful shock of her husband's death, became a confirmed invalid. They had next to nothing upon which to live, just a pitiful little income of fifty pounds a year, and the help none too willingly given by several relations of Mrs. Power's. At best it was but a meagre way of living, and though, as the poor lady often said, "Beggars mustn't be choosers," yet when little slights came her way, the bitterness of the new state of things was no small trial to have to bear.

"I must keep up for Jeanne's sake," Mrs. Power said more than once to her one great friend and confidant. "Jeanne is such a child yet, and she does not realize why everything should be different now that Jack has gone from us. Poor child, to her it is bad enough that we have to do without Jack—she cannot understand why she should be looked at with other

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eyes because she has nothing a year instead of a good regular income. So I feel that I must bear with any interferences that my people may think fit to put on me. They do help me, and it makes all the difference to Jeanne. If she had to turn out into the world at her age it would be harder than it is. I must bear anything while I am able to keep Jeanne with me, and, by-and-bye, when I am stronger, I may be able to earn a living for us both."

But, alas, Mrs. Power did not get any stronger, and the dream that she might one day be able to put her shoulder to the wheel and make enough to keep both Jeanne and herself was destined never to be realized. Little by little her small stock of strength failed and dwindled until it became patent to the most unobservant that she would never be anything but a burden in this world again. Poor soul, she was the last to know it as a certainty. Everyone who came in contact with her knew that her days on earth were numbered; but she hoped against hope, and Jeanne, with a wonderful fortitude in one so young, never showed by sign or look that the fatal knowledge was also hers. So time drifted on and Jeanne was nearly twenty-one years old.

It happened one day that Jeanne had been out to do some trifling commissions for the house, and Mrs. Power left alone, came to a sudden grasp of the truth. I can hardly tell

how or why this was, but towards five o'clock when her doctor came in with his cheery greeting and warm firm hand-clasp, she straightway put a question to him. "Doctor," she said, "I want you to give me a plain answer to a plain question."

"What is it now?" the doctor asked.

"You'll tell me the truth, doctor?" Mrs. Power said anxiously.

"If I can," he replied cautiously.

"You can, if you will," said she eagerly. "It's just this. Am I going to get over this illness, or am I going to die?"

"My dear Mrs. Power," he returned kindly, "we are all going to die some day."

"You have answered me to all intents and purposes," she said with a gasp. "Don't think I am anxious for my own sake. It is best to look these things fair and square in the face. I'm not afraid to die; but I *am* afraid of one thing. I am afraid of leaving Jeanne."

"My dear Mrs. Power," said Dr. Johnstone very kindly, "I will be frank with you. Be strong and well as you once were, you never will again. But with care and attention there might be a chance of staving off the evil day for a long time."

"You mean if I were rich?" she began.

"If you were rich," he replied, "I should send you to Egypt at once."

"Yes, I understand. Then as I am not rich

enough to be sent to Egypt, how long do you give me?"

"It might be three months—it might be much longer. Truly, I cannot positively say."

"But I shall never be strong and well again—that is a certainty?" she said wistfully.

"I am afraid so," replied the doctor.

Then she was left alone by the small fire in their one little sitting-room to think over what she had gleaned from Dr. Johnstone. She was not so sorry for herself, nay, she was not sorry at all. She was worn and weary with the stress of life. She had basked in the sunshine of love and prosperity so long that now, when the evil days of poverty and loneliness had fallen upon her, she had not moral courage to stand up and do battle with the inevitable. On the whole she felt that it would be best so far as she herself was concerned to have a long, long rest which would have no awakening to the sordid and petty troubles of this life, and only one thing in any way held her back and made her cling to earth-life. That was the child, Jeanne. For Jeanne would be alone, all alone, and she was not quite one and twenty yet and for years—well, for three years her life had been all shadow.

Jeanne came in presently, a tall slim young thing with a brilliant color and radiant eyes. Mrs. Power sighed as she looked at her.

"Well, darling, where have you been?" she

asked gently, mindful of the news which she must sooner or later break to her.

"I've had a lovely walk, dearest," the girl replied. "I did my shopping and then—then I met Jim Macdonald. He turned back with me and we went quite a walk together. You don't mind, do you, dear?"

"Mind, why should I mind?" the mother asked, while through her fond heart there rang a sudden thought, a thought that was as a living hope. What if Jim Macdonald was—was serious, and Jeanne liked him? What if, after all her anguish of mind, she could slip quietly out of life and die happily at peace about her only child? What if she and Jim were to marry and Jeanne would be safe sheltered for ever? Oh, it seemed to the dying mother to be a prospect too good to hope for.

"He seems a nice young fellow," she remarked, in as indifferent a tone as she could manage.

Jeanne looked up from the tea-pot, but only for an instant. "Do you like him, Mother?" she said, evading the question of her own liking for him.

"Yes, I think he seems nice, and kind, and true," Mrs. Power said. "Fine qualities, Jeanne, my child, which will serve him and those about him in good stead when more showy traits are worn out or become hateful. Yes, I'll have a bit of toast, dear. Thanks."

Jeanne handed the hot buttered toast to her mother and replenished her cup, but she made no further remark on the subject of Jim Macdonald. Mrs. Power, however, went on presently. "You might bring him in to see me sometimes, dear," she said. "It would be a change to have a chat with someone else than the doctor, dear and good as he has always been."

The girl flushed up very red and turned an indignant face towards her mother. "If people were decent," she flashed out, "you would have no lack of friends to come in and chat with you, Mother. When I think of how people used to swarm in and out of the old house, and how it was 'dear Mrs. Power' here and 'dearest Mrs. Power' there, it makes me quite ill. I met Mr. Lloyd in St. Thomas' Street just now, and—and," in a shamed way, "he didn't know me."

For a moment the mother's face changed. "Is that so? Ah, well, my child, you will, if ever prosperity comes to us again, at least have the advantage of knowing that there are friends and friends—of knowing who are your real friends and who are not likely to trouble you."

"When we are rich, Mother"—Jeanne, poor child, was very fond of talking of the time when they would be well off again, "we shall not need a very large house for the purpose of entertaining the friends who have been good to us in our poverty. And, with my consent, Mr.

Lloyd will never be one of them. What can he do for us now? Give us a kindly word, a pleasant smile, a cheery time o'day, perhaps, to stretch a point a long, long way, for him sometimes to pay you a visit. Would any of these things be much to do for the widow and child of an old friend who freely gave him of the best that he had? And he's only one of many. Ugh, I hate them all."

"You are young, Jeanne darling," returned Mrs. Power gently. "They are none of them worth hating, not one of those who used to know us so well when we were comfortably off, and who have quite forgotten us now that we are poor and dependent on others. Well, this young Jim is not one of these, since we have known him in our poor days. So bring him in one day to see me, dear. It will be a pleasure to me."

The result of this conversation was that a few days afterwards Jeanne came in in time for her mother's tea—for she never allowed anything to stand in the way of that—accompanied by a young man. And his name was Jim Macdonald. He had been to see Mrs. Power before, but not in any intimate way, and he spoke as if it were a very special privilege that he was permitted to do so at all. Mrs. Power was more charmed with him than she had been by anyone for a long time, and told him to come in as often as he would. "It is such a change for me to

have a visitor now and again," she explained. "I am such an invalid and get out so seldom."

He promised to come in very often, and he certainly kept his word, for once being made free of the house, he seemed to be in and out like a dog in a fair. And with every day Mrs. Power grew steadily weaker and weaker, until no one who looked at her could fail to see how near the end was. It was several months after Jim Macdonald had first come in with Jeanne that Mrs. Power ventured to speak to him of the anxiety that was lying so heavily on her heart. "I shall not be long now," she said, more in answer to his look of pity than in reply to his questioning greeting. "Oh, yes," with a faint smile, "I am almost through my pilgrimage now, and but for one thing I should be glad to be at rest."

"And that is—?" he asked.

"My child—Jeanne," she said, lingering lovingly on the dear name, which meant everything in the wide world to her. "You see, she will be all alone, excepting for some not very near relations who can never be what I have been to her. I fear that the time may come when my darling may look back with regret on even our poor little home. After all, it has been our home, and it has been an abode of peace," she ended with a sigh.

The young man murmured something quite unintelligible of which Mrs. Power only

caught the words "happy" and "marry." In her weakness and excitement she caught at them as a drowning man catches at a straw. "What! You want to marry Jeanne?" she cried. "Oh, if you knew how utterly happy you have made me! Now I can die in peace. Oh, Mr. Macdonald, you can never guess what I have suffered at the thought of leaving my only girl all alone in this cruel world. She is all that I have, the most affectionate, unselfish, dear girl that ever smoothed a dying woman's path to the grave."

For a moment Jim Macdonald was fairly stunned. He had never thought of asking Jeanne to marry him. He was rich, young, good-looking, and he had taken a good deal of pains to make her love him. He had made love to her for months past. But marrying—that was a totally different matter. He had never thought of that. And here was this poor woman, with death stamped on her face, fretting her heart out about the girl she was leaving alone. He had not the heart to tell her that, though he had been very friendly, he did not mean to become anything more; that his idea of marrying was to improve his place in the world, which would certainly not be by making Jeanne Power his wife. Mrs. Power went on speaking.

"I feel somehow," she said, speaking in a strange, far-away voice, "as if, now that the

awful doubt is lifted, I may be taken very soon. It has upset me a little."

He got up at once. "Mrs. Power," he said nervously, "I will come in again another day—to-morrow—any time. I am sure you ought to rest now."

Mrs. Power took his strong firm hand in both of her wasted ones. "My dear boy," she said, "I may call you so? I am so weak, such a shadow of a woman, I can bear nothing nowadays. But oh, you have made me so happy! Whatever happens I may leave my darling to your care? You will stand between her and the world? Poor child, she has known too much of the rebuffs which change of fortune brings upon us. Thank God that is all over for her now. I may trust you."

She looked at him beseechingly and still held his hand in her own hot grasp. Jim Macdonald paled and flushed alternately, but he could not bring himself to say the words which were trembling on his tongue. "Yes, Mrs. Power, you may trust me," he said. And then she drew him down until his face was on a level with hers and she kissed him.

That night Mrs. Power died. The end was sudden, as the end of a long illness so often is. It was all over in an incredibly short time, and it was only a few minutes before the end that she was able to say anything to Jeanne about the future.

"My Jeanne," she whispered painfully, "I am not so unhappy in leaving you as I should have been yesterday. Jim Macdonald loves you. He told me so to-day. I did not say anything because I knew that he had not spoken and I thought he would like to tell you himself. But now, you must hear it, for I want you to know how happy I am in your love and how gladly I leave you in his hands. And oh, Jeanne, I am so tired—so glad to go."

She scarcely spoke again, and before the dawn came all was quiet in the little house save the sound of a girl's uncontrollable weeping.

CHAPTER II.

AND afterwards—well, it is no new story though it is a true one. The sad dreary days went by. All that was left of Jeanne's mother was laid quietly away in the little churchyard just outside the city, where her father had been laid three years before. The will, leaving the poor little fifty pounds a year to Jeanne, was duly read, and then the few relations who had come to pay the last respects to the dead woman slipped away one by one, saving one old lady who, pausing as she held the girl's hand, asked what she was going to do.

Jeanne's Marriage.

"You cannot live on fifty pounds a year, Jeanne," she said. "And you could not live here alone, even if you had the means to keep up a house. Have you formed any plans yet?"

"Not yet," said Jeanne, who was naturally waiting for Jim to suggest his plans to her. He had called the day after that of her mother's death and had left a card with a message of condolence scribbled upon it, but she had not yet seen him. Surely he would come to-morrow, and then she would be able to tell her people that they need not fear about her, that she would be no trouble to any of them henceforth.

"But you must have some notion of what you are going to do," said the old lady firmly. She did not believe in what she called "giving way to sickly sentiment."

"It is early days yet, Cousin Barbara," said Jeanne, with dignity, "to have all my plans cut and dried. But I will write in a few days, when I have pulled myself together a little, and tell you what I think of doing. I will ask your advice," she added.

"I cannot help you much, but I may be of some use to you," said Cousin Barbara, somewhat mollified.

And at last Jeanne was left alone. Alone, poor child, for a much longer time than she had any idea of. Jim Macdonald duly called the following day, was very kind and tender,

told her that she was a dear little soul, and bade her cheer up and everything would fall into place some day. But he said no word as to the future, and, when he was gone, Jeanne sat down with a strange weight at her heart, a new sense of pain, a realization of the bitter truth that he had no intention of making her fate his. I can hardly tell you how Jeanne Power lived through that dreadful time. She stayed on in the little house for a few days, and then she moved into cheap lodgings, while all the things which had made their home were scattered to the four winds of heaven. It was hard; it was very hard.

As for Jim Macdonald, he drifted quietly away from Blankhampton, and though he wrote to her once or twice, soon dropped even that much appearance of interest in her. So Jeanne, who was but just one-and-twenty, gathered her few possessions together, and with her few poor pounds in her purse, turned her back on the old city of her birth and set her face towards London.

She had consulted none of her relations. Cousin Barbara was the only one of all who had even hinted at being of any use to her. To her, therefore, she wrote saying that she had heard of an opening in London, and that she would let her have particulars later on.

And then began the hard part of Jeanne Power's life. I am not going into the full

history of her struggle for fortune, the struggle in which Fortune came off so victoriously uppermost that by the time a couple of years had gone by Jeanne was a broken wreck of what she had been, and would hardly have been recognized as the tall girl, with brilliant color and radiant eyes, who had come into her mother's room full of her meeting with Jim Macdonald. She had tried everything—the stage, the concert room, journalism, story-writing; she had tried living on her income, she had even been one of many applicants for a place in a bar; but it had all been worse than useless. And yet her pride forbade her to appeal to her relatives, to acknowledge herself a complete failure. So she struggled on until two years had gone by, and then something happened. In desperation she tried for a post as clerk in the office of a large shop, and by one of those strange chances which come into the lives of all of us at some time or other, she happened to attract the attention of one of the heads of the house.

It would be hard to say how it was done; but he drew from her the greater part of her history and the then circumstances of her life. "Come to me to-morrow," he said. "Come to me at this hour and I will see if I can make a place for you. It won't be in the counting-house," he said, with a smile, "for there experience is a *sine qua non*."

And Jeanne did go again on the following day, and then Mr. Gascoigne made a startling proposition to her. In plain words he told her that he was forty-one years old, that his income was something like seven thousand a year, that he was unmarried. And then he took Jeanne's breath away by asking her to marry him. Jeanne fairly stared at him.

"But, Mr. Gascoigne," she exclaimed, "you don't know anything about me. I may be an utter impostor for aught you know to the contrary."

"I think not," he said, with a quiet smile; "at all events, I am willing to run the risk of that."

And in the end Jeanne went out of the great emporium for all manner of ladies' dress which is known as the establishment of Messrs. Gascoigne & Sons, engaged to be married to the eldest of the sons, the then head of the business.

John Gascoigne hurried the marriage on as quickly as possible. As he very reasonably said, they had nothing to gain by waiting, and he hated the idea of Jeanne being alone in a boarding-house, even though it was one of the best to be found in London and was run by a lady who had been known to him for twenty years. "You have been alone so long, darling," he said to her, a few days after they had effected the change of quarters for her, "and I

want to begin to make up to you as I cannot do here. Don't keep me waiting long—every day is a day wasted."

So they were married. Mrs. Thomas, the lady with whom Jeanne was staying, went to the church with her, the best man was the bridegroom's younger brother, a married sister of theirs came with her husband, a barrister, and the clergyman who officiated was John Gascoigne's most intimate friend. Jeanne wore a simple travelling gown which had cost a small fortune, and her present from John was a diamond necklace worth five hundred pounds. And from that day new life began. All to Jeanne was as a revelation. Months and months passed before she grew used to her new surroundings; to the fact that she could have anything that she saw when she went to fetch her husband from his business, to the feeling of her rich furs, the servants who waited upon her, the luxury in which she lived—she who had scraped along on fifty pounds a year, who had scrambled in and out of the humble 'bus and had tramped many and many a mile on the look-out for work that she might save the cost of even that modest aid to locomotion. She had her smart victoria now and her cosy single brougham, and John Gascoigne seemed only to live to do her pleasure, or, as he put it, to make up for all the hardships and privations which she had suffered in the past.

And yet Jeanne was only very grateful to him for all that he had done for her. It was well that he had never asked her if she loved him or not. It was well that he was content to lavish his deep love upon her and to ask for nothing in return. For Jeanne so far had no feeling excepting that of profound and utter gratitude.

"Don't give me so much," she cried one day when he had planned some new surprise for her. "You do too much for me. I do nothing for you. It is a one-sided bargain altogether."

"You make me happy," said he, holding her close to him. "That is enough surely for any man."

It had been on the tip of his tongue to say that she could love him in return, but he choked the words down, and said that she made him happy instead. Jeanne looked at him and wondered why she did not idolize him as such a man deserved to be idolized. He was exceedingly handsome, and his manner was delightful. He was tall and of a commanding appearance, and his heart—Oh, was ever such a heart poured out upon any girl before? And yet—and yet—there was an image which had its place in her heart and would not be ousted from it. She still thought of Jim Macdonald, still wondered where he was and what had become of him. John Gascoigne was her hus-

band, but Jim MacDonald was her sweetheart still.

And one day she saw him. By that time she had grown used to her life, to wearing her prettiest dresses every day without fear as to where the next one would come from, to sitting in the stalls of the theatre, to having John to take care of her, to bid her stand under shelter until the carriage should come up, to draw the furs and laces up about her throat, and to coddle her and treat her as if she were something very precious. So she was not as much flurried as she might have been, but as she sat in her victoria under the shade of the trees in the park, she held out her hand and greeted him quite quietly, as if he was but the most ordinary of her acquaintances.

She told him that she was married and to whom, and he congratulated her, and asked if he might call. She replied that he might certainly do so if he wished, and then she gave him her address and told him when she was likely to be at home.

And Jim did call; called, if the truth be told, many times, and finally Jeanne asked him to dinner in order that her husband might meet him. Of course she had told John of her meeting with this old friend, and John had professed himself quite delighted that fate had brought such a meeting about. But when the two men met he realized in a moment that there had

been a love affair between them, and he carefully kept himself from seeming to watch his wife during the whole evening.

But he watched Jim, and he learned that he, at least, was over head and ears in love with Jeanne still. There were a dozen other people present, but John Gascoigne noted that whenever Jeanne spoke, her old friend turned instinctively towards her and could scarcely answer to the remarks of the lady whom he had taken in to dinner.

And when the guests had all gone he saw that Jeanne was as white as a ghost. "You are fagged out, my dearest," he said, taking her hand.

"Fagged out," said Jeanne. But she said nothing of Jim Macdonald, not so much as to ask how he had liked him. And John Gascoigne, on his side, said nothing either, so that somehow or other his name grew to be an avoided subject between them.

But still John Gascoigne's faith in Jeanne never faltered. He asked no questions of her out-goings or her in-comings, and at last he had his reward. For it happened one day that he had promised to be home early, as they were going to the opera. He entered the house unseen by anyone and passed straight into the smaller of the two drawing-rooms, becoming immediately aware that his wife was not alone. As he crossed the richly-covered

floor he heard a voice say—"On my word, darling, you misjudge me. I always loved you. I tried hard to find out where you were—I—I——"

John Gascoigne turned to go. He did not want to hear the rest. He had come in in the middle of a scene, and had no fancy for the post of eaves-dropper, even though one of the speakers was his wife. Then, as he moved quietly away, he heard Jeanne say in a tone of sharp scorn—"You meant to marry me, then?"

"I—I——"

"No, don't trouble to explain," said Jeanne in a cool cutting voice, "it is all too obvious. Besides, it is all over now, and all the explanations in the world are useless."

"But if they were not useless?" he heard Macdonald say in a dangerously seductive tone. John Gascoigne no longer thought of retreating—he stood there rooted to the spot.

"They are useless," Jeanne repeated. "I know you thoroughly. I can read you like a book. It was pitiful at the time and it hurt while it lasted. I knew so little of men then. But now, if I were free to-morrow I would not trust you for one hour. I have to thank you for one thing, and I do thank you," she added, with a pitiful break in her voice, "and that was for letting my mother die in the belief that you loved me and meant to stand between me and the world. It gave her a peaceful death,

and it did not matter that my heart was almost broken afterwards when you—cooled off. I got over it. I met the best man in all the world, and I would not change him for any other man on earth."

"But you don't love him," said Macdonald.

"I don't love him!" echoed Jeanne, speaking in sharp, shrill accents. "As you understand love, I don't. Don't love him? Why, I adore him. I worship the ground under his feet—I idolize him. He is my religion, as he has been my salvation. My God, when I compare him with such a one as you, it is desecration."

"Then why did you let me come here?" Macdonald asked, trying to seem cool and unconcerned.

"Simply because I wanted you to know sooner or later that I knew the full extent of your cruelty to me three years ago. I never had the chance then to tell you that my mother had told me of her conversation with you, and that I knew how it was that you had satisfied her about me. I have always meant to thank you, though, for sparing her the pang of leaving me alone, and for that I do thank you."

A few minutes later, when Jim Macdonald had passed forever out of the presence of the woman whose heart he had broken, John Gascoigne entered the room where Jeanne was.

"Jeanne," he said simply, "I have a confes-

sion to make to you. I heard everything that passed just now."

"You—did?" she breathed rather than spoke.

"And, Jeanne, what can I say to you?" he said, taking both her hands and holding them against his breast. "But that you have made me the happiest man in all the world to-day. My poor darling, you never told me how you suffered then. Darling—darling—I shall never be able to make up for it all."

* * * * *

Half an hour later Jeanne sat beside her bedroom window waiting for her maid. Her husband's last words were ringing in her ears. Her mind was clear, her conscience free, and yet through her brain there rang one thought: "False—unfaithful—unworthy—and yet, oh, my God, I cannot help loving him!"

A HEART UNSPOTTED.

"A heart unspotted is not easily daunted."

—SHAKESPEARE.

CHAPTER I.

"My cousin, Miss Chichester," said Tom Langton, with a wave of his hand.

The three men to whom he thus presented the shabby little girl whom he called "My cousin, Miss Chichester," bowed in their several turns and in their several fashions. They were all brother officers of Tom's, who had accompanied him to Brook House that they might share in the pick of the shooting, beginning on the immortal 12th. They were naturally all very good shots (had they been otherwise they might have whistled, so to speak, for invitations to Brook House at that particular time of year), and last, but not least, they were all very tolerable looking.

"My cousin, Miss Chichester," looked frightened. She was a tiny creature, pale and slim, with dark hair, blue eyes, and brows and lashes of midnight. Her features were small, and the nose had a tendency to turn upwards rather

than downwards. She was very shabby and was dressed in a scanty frock of black stuff very much the worse for wear. She looked doubtfully at Tom and at Tom's friends, and very much as if she was not sure whether she ought to go or stay.

"Where are all the others, Pussy?" Tom asked, putting an end to her idea of flight.

"Aunt Agnes did not expect you until the seven o'clock train, Tom," she replied, in a rather quavering voice.

"Then I suppose they are all out?" said Tom, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Yes, Tom; they have gone to a garden-party at Lady Northam's, and my uncle is on the Bench to-day."

"Oh, well, we shall manage to exist till they come back," remarked Tom, with the unfeeling tone that only a brother can assume. "They'll be home soon enough. By-the-by, couldn't you give us some tea or something? We are all famished and thirsty."

"Certainly, Tom; I'll go and send it at once," she replied eagerly, and moving towards the door as she spoke.

"Can't you ring and order it from here?" Tom asked impatiently.

"Oh, yes;" then doubtfully, "but I think I will go; it is just the servants'——"

"Sit still," said Tom imperiously, under his breath.

He rang the bell, a good sounding peal, as he spoke, and turned towards the door when the servant came, without waiting for his cousin to speak.

"Oh, William, bring us some tea as soon as you can," he said.

"Certainly, Mr. Tom," replied that functionary, in his most urbane tones.

When Mr. Tom was at home, his presence always had the effect of quickening the service of the house, not because he was hard to please, or not absolutely civil to his inferiors, but because there was always a ring in his voice which meant command. In an incredibly short time the stately William returned with the tea and set it in front of Miss Chichester, who had subsided on to a chair with her little hands clasped together before her, in an attitude of patient waiting. She poured out the several cups of tea, and Tom got up and ministered to his friends in very hospitable style, finally going back to his cousin's side for his own cup.

"William has brought a cup short," he remarked, and, before she could speak, went to the bell and rang it again.

"I don't want one," she stammered, nervously.

"Nonsense! Oh, William, another cup. Thanks."

They had barely finished the small meal, when the door was opened, and three ladies

came into the room. "Oh, my dear Tom," cried the larger and elder of these, "what made you come by so much earlier a train than you said? We would not have gone out for worlds if we had known. Why, you had not even a carriage sent to meet you."

"It did not matter, Mother, thank you," said Tom, kissing her. "We are here; that is the great thing, you know. Let me introduce Captain Fox to you," taking one of the men by the arm, "and this is Mr. Griffiths, and this Mr. Ryan." Then he turned from them to scrub his cheek for a moment against the cheek of both his handsome sisters in turn.

"And you have had something to eat?" said Mrs. Langton looking at the tray.

"Oh, yes, many thanks!" cried the three visitors in the same breath.

"Yes, Pussy looked after us splendidly," answered Tom.

Her attention thus called to her niece, Mrs. Langton turned to Pussy. "You may take my sunshade upstairs for me, Mary," she said, in a cold voice.

"Yes, Aunt Agnes," Pussy replied, looking more frightened than ever.

Tom raised his eyebrows as she disappeared, and glanced significantly at his mother, as if to ask a question of her. But Mrs. Langton either did not or would not see the look, and kept up a steady flow of conversation with the

newly-arrived guests. Tom's eyebrows went up almost to the roots of his hair, but just then he could not say anything more plain than to ask the reason of the tone by a look.

But half an hour later, when the guests had been all shown to their rooms, he knocked at his mother's door, and, receiving permission to enter, went in and put a question plump and plain to her.

"What's wrong with little Pussy?" he asked bluntly.

"I did not know that anything was wrong with little Pussy, as you call her," Mrs. Langton replied, in an icy tone. "Has Mary been complaining to you, pray?"

Tom sat down impatiently, with his hands thrust deep down into the pockets of his coat. "Complaining—no, of course not. Is it likely?"

"Yes, very likely," returned his mother drily.

"Well, likely or not, she did not complain in any way," Tom declared. "But I've got eyes in my head; I can see like other people."

"And what do you see?" demanded his mother sharply.

Tom looked in some surprise at the tone—more at the tone than at the actual words. "Well, my dear Mother," he answered mildly, "I see that my cousin, my father's only niece, is very shabby for one thing."

"Beggars must not be choosers," retorted his mother quickly.

"I don't think that the child of my father's only sister ought to be looked upon as a beggar in this house," said Tom gravely. "And the poor child could not help her father and mother dying and leaving her as they did. Bless me, they didn't do it on purpose, did they?"

"I really cannot say," replied Mrs. Langton, in a very unsympathetic tone, "but be that as it may, I have quite as much as I can do to dress myself and your sisters on my allowance, without spending a fortune on an interloper like Mary Chichester. So, pray let me hear no more of this exceedingly unpleasant topic."

She waved her hand, as if to show that she wished him to go, and Tom, with a vexed feeling that he had probably done more harm than good by his well-meant interference, went hurriedly out of the room, almost wishing that he had not said anything about his little cousin at all. He thought about her a good deal while he was dressing for dinner; yes, a good deal. Hang it, it was a shame that just because a poor little girl did not happen to have been born under the same roof, or not of the same branch of the family, she should be treated as an interloper if not actually as an outcast. He was just in the midst of wondering whether he could not manage to screw a few pounds a year out of his own allowance that she might look a little more like his sisters, when the door opened and young Ryan came in.

"I may come in, old chap?" he asked.

"Why, yes, to be sure," answered Tom heartily.

So young Ryan, who was but little more than a boy, came in and wandered about the room, looking at the various pictures, chiefly representations of Tom at different stages of his school career. "I say, Tom, old fellow," he said after a while, "you're a sly dog!"

"For why?" Tom asked, pausing with a brush in either hand.

"Well, you never told me a single word about the pretty cousin, and she *is* pretty, by Jove, no mistake about that."

"Look here, Ryan," said Tom, suddenly growing as grave as a judge, "you are to let my little cousin alone, do you hear?"

"Eh?" said the other in an inquiring tone.

"Yes, I know exactly what you mean," said Tom steadily; "but you're wrong, quite wrong, I haven't such a thought in my head. Still, I am not going to have her played with and flirted with, so you had better understand that from the beginning. You can flirt to any extent with my sisters; they can take care of themselves far better than you can. But my cousin is to be let alone, do you see?"

"My dear fellow, no one could possibly help seeing," said Ryan, with a laugh, "you make it too devilish plain for any mistake. And what if I should get seriously hit in that quarter, eh?"

"You've got to marry money," said Tom, grimly ; " you tell me so about a hundred times a day. And my cousin hasn't got any money, so the idea is no good."

"Very well ; I will take care to give the young lady a wide berth," said Ryan, in much amusement, thinking that Tom was desperately hard hit in that quarter, and that he had hidden the fact very clumsily.

"There's the bell. By Jove, we're late ! Come along. To be late for dinner is the first and almost the only crime in this house ;" and even as he uttered the words, the thought flashed across his mind that another and more awful crime in that house was to be unprotected and poor.

CHAPTER II.

A FORTNIGHT soon goes over, and the two weeks that Tom Langton and his comrades spent at Brook House seemed to go by with the rapidity of magic. It was wonderful to Tom that he saw so little of his cousin, Mary Chichester. Even to him, knowing as he did his mother's indomitable resolution in carrying out any course of action that she had laid down as suitable to any particular occasion, it came as a surprise that he could live under the same roof with one of his own kin, and yet see so remark-

ably little of her. She never appeared at dinner, nor even in the evening afterwards. If ever he chanced to come across her before the men went off to shoot, she always told him that she had had breakfast long ago. "I can't think where you get it," he said one morning, half fretfully, "I came down the other morning ever so early, and there was not a sign of you to be seen."

"Oh, but I get fed all right," cried she, laughing heartily, and holding out a plump little hand to show what good condition she was in.

"I'm not so sure about that," Tom retorted, crossly; "I don't see why you should be shoved out of sight as you are, Pussy. It's a burning shame; that's what I think about it."

She looked at him in a strange, startled kind of way, and a vivid blush spread itself over her pale face, staining it scarlet from chin to brow. "Don't say it," she said, under her breath. "I am quite content—I am very happy here. Aunt Agnes could not take me out when she has two daughters of her own. It is out of the question. I do not expect it, nor even wish it. I am more than content."

"Pussy," said Tom, in a queer, strained kind of voice, and catching her small hands in his larger clasp, "do you know what you are? You are——"

"Mary!" exclaimed a voice, in high staccato

accents of extreme astonishment. "What are you doing here? I thought I told you——"

"Yes, Aunt Agnes," gasped the girl, and, wrenching her hands free from the clasp of Tom's, she fled away as if she were trying to catch back the five minutes that she had been talking to her cousin.

Tom stood looking after her, and Mrs. Langton stood looking at Tom. "I think you ought to know, Tom," she said at last, very severely, "that neither your father nor I would ever give our consent to anything of that kind, so you had best dismiss any such idea from your mind at once."

Tom looked up at his mother. "My dear Mother," he said, in great amusement, "I was not making love to Pussy. Nothing was further from my thoughts—or hers—I assure you."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mrs. Langton coldly. "But I wish you would oblige me in one thing, Tom. It cannot be necessary to call Mary by the ridiculous name of 'Pussy.' It is most unsuitable, and is very misleading."

"I always have called her Pussy," said Tom, obstinately—Tom was very like his mother in some things.

"Very absurd of you to do so; the sooner such a silly habit is forgotten the better," remarked his mother, with more acidity than the matter seemed to be worth.

Well, although Mrs. Langton did not refer to

the child again, and the subject was not mentioned any more between them, she had been put on her guard, and Tom had no more chances of speaking alone to his cousin during his not very long visit home. He had not the smallest notion how it was managed, but the fact remains, nevertheless, that she seemed to have been positively spirited away. He spoke to his father about it once.

"Don't you think, sir," he said, one afternoon, when they were toddling slowly round the stable together, "don't you think that little Pussy might be let to have a better time on the whole than she does?"

"Yes, I do," answered the old Squire, promptly; "but when I hinted as much, your mother and the girls really made my life such a burden to me, that I was glad to drop the subject entirely."

"Your life ought not to be made a burden," said Tom indignantly, "not over anything. I think that the little girl is shamefully treated all around. Why doesn't she come in to dinner as the other girls do? Why doesn't she have pretty frocks and things as the others do? It is not right to have such a difference made between girls in the same house. I wouldn't allow it, if I were you, sir."

"My dear lad," said the Squire, smiling, yet with a certain sadness, "when you have been married as many years as I have, you won't

talk about allowing this or not allowing the other. No, no, my boy; you will do just what your wife decrees, and be very thankful if she gives you a peaceable time on the whole."

"I don't quite think so," said Tom, with conviction.

"No; *I* didn't *once*," returned the Squire, quizzically. "Ah, take my advice, my dear lad, and never interfere in women's affairs any more than you can help. It don't pay! Besides, in this case, I asked the little girl herself about it, and she told me she was perfectly happy, and begged me to say nothing on her account. All girls are not cracked on going to parties, you know," he added, sagely.

Tom did not attempt to urge the question further. He jerked his head back several times and said nothing. As he remarked to himself, it was no use arguing any longer with such an old fool. He was fond of his father in a way, but the dominant figure in the establishment was not the Squire, but the Squire's wife.

And at the expiration of his leave, he went back to his regiment without having spoken alone with Pussy.

Many months went by ere he saw her again. His long leave he spent that year in Algiers, going there on a somewhat wild-goose expedition, along with several other men of his regiment, in search of certain curios with a fortune in them. Their especial quest was black amber—

that most rare of treasures ; but though they had much definite information, said to be of a most exclusive character, and spent a good deal of time and also a good deal of money, they did not light upon any black amber among the hundreds of mouth pieces brought forth for their inspection in the various bazaars. And before he was lucky enough to get any more leave, a double calamity had fallen upon the whole family of Langton, for the kind old Squire was stricken down and died in a fit, brought on by the news that a large and very risky speculation had failed, and failed in a way that meant positive beggary for the rest of his life.

The entire family, with the exception of Tom, seemed to be stunned. For days Mrs. Langton neither could nor would understand that, instead of being mistress of Brook House, she had nothing but her settlements to live upon for the rest of her life. Her settlements amounted to about eight hundred a year ; and, although that is a very substantial buffer between three ladies and the poverty of the workhouse, it did not seem a particularly large income to one who had been mistress of as many thousands.

However, at last Tom made her understand that it was useless for her to rail against fate, and that the best thing she could possibly do was to accept the inevitable with as good a grace

as she could, and be thankful that things were no worse.

"My dear mother," he said sensibly, "it isn't of the least use to tell me that last year you had eight thousand a year at your command. You never had anything like that sum, though you have lived at the rate of it, which is a vastly different thing. As a matter of fact, the estate brings in about three thousand a year now, and it will take at least ten years for me to clear off my father's liabilities. I have arranged it all with the creditors, and I shall only take four hundred a year for myself until everything else is paid. If it falls hard on you, it doesn't fall exactly lightly on me."

"And how are your sisters to get suitably settled?" Mrs. Langton cried.

"They had a pretty good spell at the eight thousand a year scale," answered Tom, unfeelingly.

"Well, at all events, I will not have Mary Chichester staying on here in idleness," Mrs. Langton exclaimed.

"Mary is not to be turned out; I won't have it," Tom cried, in a sudden access of passion.

"I cannot possibly afford to keep her," Mrs. Langton persisted.

"I will give you a hundred a year out of my income," said Tom, hurriedly. "I will never consent to her being turned out."

So it was settled, and, after a very few more

days had gone by, Mrs. Langton and the three girls left Brook House with many tears and took up their abode in a small villa at Brighton—it must be confessed with an eye to the property of an old aunt of the late Squire's who lived there, and was worth nobody knew what.

And for Mary Chichester, if life had been hard and dull in the lavish establishment at Brook House, existence was still harder for her in the villa at Brighton. She worked like a slave, without either the wages or the consideration of a servant. She had no recreations, no pleasures, no new frocks—not even secondhand ones handed down to her by her cousins; and when Tom came, which was not very often, she was kept more busily employed—out of the way of mischief, as Mrs. Langton put it—than ever. But she did contrive to see Tom, all the same—Tom, who to her was the soul of honor and chivalry, the embodiment of all the virtues. It was the only thing that made such a life worth living.

Once or twice she went, by command of that imperious old dame, to take tea with the rich old aunt, and then in her innocence and loyalty she let out far more of the real state of affairs than she herself had any notion of. For she told how good Tom had always been to her, how he had given up a hundred a year of his modest income that she might stay on with her own people, instead of going out into the world

to earn her bread among strangers. And the old lady heard all these little scraps of information and pondered over them when she was alone, with a very startling result; for at last she died, and in due course was buried, and then her very affectionate relatives gathered themselves together in the handsome library of her house, that they might hear the reading of her last will and testament.

It was brief and to the point, and it left everything of which she died possessed to her great-niece, Mary Chichester.

I may as well say at once that the news burst upon the four ladies with the force of a thunderclap. Tom was not present, being, indeed, occupied on a long court-martial—which had prevented his getting leave to attend his old relative's funeral. Well, yes, possibly the plenitude of defunct relatives which abounds in Her Majesty's Service might have had something to do with it.

So, Tom being absent, only Mrs. Langton and her daughters and Mary Chichester were present at the funeral, and at the reading of the will.

Mrs. Langton had had no thought of her niece's being present, but the old lady's lawyer had requested her presence in such plain terms that there was no preventing it. And when all was over, and they were back once more in their villa, then the vials of Mrs. Langton's long

pent-up wrath burst out, and she told the girl in plain, nervous English what she thought of her. So long as the torrent of angry words lasted Mary stood without speaking, speechless, indeed, with astonishment and dismay. But Mrs. Langton's last furious taunt stung her to the very quick. "I hope you are satisfied," the older woman screamed. "Right well you have rewarded my boy for his foolish sacrifices—the sacrifices made to keep you here in idleness, instead of letting you go out into the world to earn your own living. You have stolen his birthright from him, and may your ill-gotten gains be a curse to you and yours for ever!"

"I think you had better not say any more, Mother," put in the elder Miss Langton, quietly—she had an eye to future benefits to be got out of Mary Chichester.

"*What*, are you two going to turn against me for the sake of this ingrate?" Mrs. Langton began, passionately. But Mary heard no more—with a cry she turned and fled, never stopping till she had reached the shelter of her own tiny bedroom.

Once there, however, her resolves were soon made. She counted the money in her shabby purse, and, putting on her hat again and taking her coat over her arm, she slipped quietly out of the house, and disappeared among the crowds on the sea-front.

* * * * *

The time was half-past seven that same evening. Tom Langton was sitting alone in his quarters, tired out with a long day passed at the court-martial—the last, Heaven be thanked—wondering, if the truth be told, how the old aunt had disposed of her property, and dreaming of what he would do if she happened to have left a good share of it to him; dreaming of how he would go down to Brighton and ask a certain little girl called Pussy to marry him, and let him make up to her for the wretched years which had gone by. “Well, what is it, Jones?” he asked, as his servant entered and stood just within the door, evidently with something to say.

“A lady to see you, surr,” said Jones, stolidly.

“A lady—what does she want?”

“Must see you very partic’lar, surr,” Jones replied.

“Oh, d——,” groaned Tom. “Well, show her in.”

Accordingly, Jones showed the lady in, and discreetly closed the door behind her.

“Tom!” she cried.

“*Pussy!*” Tom cried in turn. “What is it? What has happened? What are you doing here?”

“Oh, Tom,” she said mournfully, “I’m so unhappy. She has left everything to me—everything—hundreds of thousands of pounds.

And your mother is so angry. She says I have stolen your birthright—I, who owe you everything in the world. I was obliged to come. I wanted to see you before they could write to you. I don't want it, Tom. I shouldn't know what to do with it. I'll give it all back to you, Tom; only don't let them be angry with me any more, and say such dreadful things to me."

She paused, breathless with the vehemence of her torrent of words. Tom drew a long breath, and looked at her. "Pussy," he said, gently, "there is only one way in which I could take it."

"And that?" she cried, eagerly.

"Do you know what I was thinking just as you came in?" he asked.

"No; how should I?"

"Well, I was thinking that if the old lady had left me any of her money, I would go down to Brighton to-morrow, and ask you to marry me."

"Me!" cried Pussy, beginning to tremble.

"And you would have said——?" he asked.

"I should have said—Yes!" she cried, with a great flood of joy coming into her blue eyes.

"Pussy, Pussy!" he cried, holding out his hands to her.

"Dear Tom!" answered she, softly.

THE FINGER OF GOD.

“Every man’s life is a fairy-tale written by God’s fingers.”—HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN.

CHAPTER I.

CERTAINLY Margot’s life did not seem much like a fairy-tale. No, it was much more like a travesty or a satire, and although Margot was very devout and was, moreover, of a believing turn of mind, prone to accept everything that she saw in print, when she read that sentence of Hans Christian Andersen’s which says, “Every man’s life is a fairy-tale written by God’s fingers,” she smiled over it, thinking that the Almighty had a very strange notion of fairy-tales if He had written her life for one.

For Margot Blair was the youngest child of a widow and had three sisters older than herself. These three sisters were all fair and accounted beautiful, taking after their mother, who was fat, fair, and forty (and a little more beside). Margot, on the contrary, had followed her father in looks, and was tall and upright as a willow wand—“gawky,” her sisters called her—slight to an extreme which was most unbe-

coming, dark and sallow almost to swarthinness, with masses of almost black hair, which had a trick of slipping from its decorous confines and tumbling down her back, as her sisters said, like the snake-locks of Medusa. Margot's features were certainly not bad ; she was *called* very plain, but she had not the green eyes of the nineteenth-century heroine, nor the very wide mouth, nor the pert little pug nose, which are indispensable to success in the marriage market of fiction. No, she possessed none of these advantages, but she was lean and lanky and gawky and awkward, and she was very young.

"Dear me, child," Mrs. Blair said in fretful tones to her one day, "you grow more preposterously like your father every day. Will you *never* stop growing? What a lamp-post you are!"

It was on the tip of Margot's tongue to ask whether it was a crime that she should be like her dead father, but although she was young, painfully young, she had long ago learned the wisdom of only giving utterance to about half the thoughts that came into her mind.

"Was my father so very tall, Mother?" she said.

"Yes, very tall, terribly tall," Mrs. Blair replied. "Of course, it does not matter for a man, but it is a great affliction to have a daughter as tall as you are."

"Don't you think it is a greater affliction for me than for you, Mother?" Margot asked rather wistfully.

"No, certainly not," responded the mother sharply. "I have to pay for your dresses, haven't I?"

Margot opened her mouth as if to speak, but succeeded once more in holding her peace. A bitter thought flitted across her mind that her mother did not often pay for anything for her, excepting for boots and gloves; and they were always a very sore point, as she had had the audacity to grow both hands and feet two sizes larger than any of her sisters, who, like many other little plump girls, had hands and feet remarkable for their extreme smallness.

Poor Margot; everything she was, everything she did, everything she had, looked, said, and even what she seemed to think, was wrong in the eyes of her own people. It is so in some families, it was so in the household at Blankhampton which called Mrs. Blair mistress, and which Margot called home. To Ethelwyn, Gwen, and Maudie fell all the pleasures of their somewhat limited life; to Margot were allotted, by common consent, all the small disagreeable duties, of which there are always more than enough in establishments wherein every sixpence is expected to do the work of a shilling. It was Margot who was expected to count over the clothes for the wash every Mon-

day morning, in company with the house-parlor-maid; it was Margot who must go round to the butcher's each morning to choose the daily meat, for, as her mother always told her, it was good for her to learn as many useful things as she could, because it was not likely that she would ever have a large house of her own; it was Margot who, when she had a presentable frock—which was not by any means a matter of course—was looked on as the goddess of the tea-table on the festive occasions when Mrs. Blair was at home of an afternoon to her friends, and people had been known to remark that it was odd such a very smart little woman as Mrs. Blair should allow her parlor-maid to appear behind the tea-table without a cap. And to all intents and purposes Margot might, on these occasions, just as well have been a parlor-maid, for any pleasure she derived out of the shows. For there she stood at the back of the long table, attending to a stream of wants of this order: "Er—two cups of tea, one with sugar and one without." "One cup of tea, sugar and milk, and a cup of coffee with milk and no sugar." And never so much as a thank-you from one end of the afternoon to the other.

On one afternoon, indeed, a young man who had been particularly imperative in his manner while asking for innumerable cups of tea and coffee was so taken aback by the information

that the tall, silent girl who was serving the tea was one of the daughters of the house, that he got himself introduced to her and attempted a sort of apology.

"By Jove, you know, Miss Blair," he began, in a weak and fatuous voice, "I had no idea who you were, that you were a daughter of the house, in fact; 'pon my soul, no, by Jove! I shouldn't have come up to the table and demanded tea in quite such cool fashion, I assure you."

Margot looked down at him from the vantage of her superior height with a glance of undisguised and unmitigated contempt. "No," she said, speaking very distinctly, "if you had known, I have no doubt you would have found a spare thank-you or two to bestow on me."

"Eh?" he stammered, while several audible giggles rose from the delighted bystanders. "I—I don't quite understand you."

"No?" said Margot, still regarding him with infinite scorn. "Still, it is very easy to understand. Newly acquired thank-yous are very precious and must not be given to persons of no account, as you took me to be."

As she moved away to the other end of the table, the smothered giggles gave place to undisguised laughter, and the young man, with a blank look, appealed to those who had heard. "What does she mean?" he asked.

"My dear fellow," said a man, who could

scarcely speak for laughter, "go home and think till you do understand; and when you have grasped the young lady's meaning, bear in mind that you richly deserved the merciless snub you got."

So Margot had the triumph of a moment; but the incident soon got round to her sisters' ears and was repeated, with all the additions which it had acquired on the way, to their mother.

"What is this I hear you said to Mr. Brown, Margot?" Mrs. Blair asked as soon as the last guest had gone.

"Mr. Brown," said Margot, "I don't know which was Mr. Brown."

"Yet I am told that you took him to task for his manners, a simply unpardonable thing in a girl of your age."

Margot looked up. "Oh, you mean that little shrimp who speaks as if he had a spot on his tongue and twists his moustache all the time he is talking," she said.

"We shall not have a man friend left if Margot is allowed to go on in this way," cried Ethelwyn in a tragic tone.

Margot turned and looked at her. "Well, if anything I can say or do will relieve you of the society of such a pestilential little toad as that," she said, deliberately, "you should consider that you owe me a debt of gratitude, which it will take years to repay."

"The house will be shunned as if it had the plague," cried Gwen, lifting eyes and hands to Heaven, as represented by the ceiling.

"Don't be so silly, Gwen," exclaimed Maudie, who prided herself on being better endowed with common sense than any other member of her family. "It is no great thing if Margot did offend little Brown, and from what I heard about it, he thoroughly deserved the snub she gave him. What did happen, Margot?"

"Nothing really happened, in the ordinary sense of the word," said Margot promptly. "It was like this—he had been many times to the table, ordering everything as if he were an emperor, and as if I, whom it seems he took for a maid-servant, were dirt. And when he found out that I was the little Cinderella of the house, he got his nasty little self introduced to me, and with much punishment of the little moustache and many By Joves and such-like, he conveyed to me that if he had known I was a lady, he would have been more careful of his manners."

"Yes, and then," cried Maudie eagerly, and feeling more sympathy with her young sister than she had ever felt before, for she detested the young man Brown.

"Oh, well—perhaps I was hard on him," Margot admitted.

"Yes, but how? Tell us every word," Maudie cried.

"Well, I only told him that newly-acquired thank-yous are very precious and must not be wasted on persons of no account, as he took me to be."

"Margot, you never did!" Maudie exclaimed.

"*Margot!*" said Mrs. Blair in an awful voice, while Ethelwyn and Gwen groaned in concert, "We shall not have a single man friend left."

"Well, look here, Mother," Margot burst out, feeling that she was in for all-round censure, "you all seem to think a great deal of this little wretch, but do you really like young men who come to your house and order your servants about as if they were not even flesh and blood? What does little Brown do for you in return for your hospitality? Nothing, except to shed the lustre of his insignificant presence on you. Surely, the very least return he can make is to treat every one he meets under your roof with ordinary civility and courtesy, whether they be your daughters, your friends, or only your servants."

"You unfortunate child!" was Mrs. Blair's comment.

"But why," Margot cried. "Why?"

"Margot is perfectly right," put in Maudie in an undertone.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Blair, in a tone which she tried to make a forbearing one, "you are very young yet; when you are older you

will learn that although you may be right, in a certain sense, in all that you say, yet it does not do—to use a man's term, it does not pay—for young girls to be going round the world as social paladins, running a-tilt against every little insignificant slip of etiquette that any man may happen to make."

However, in due time the effects of Margot's first and only attempt at originality faded away and ceased to be a matter for discussion in the family circle. She felt herself that her wholly spontaneous outburst had been an utter failure, and that both her mother and her two elder sisters would much rather that she had meekly swallowed young Brown's rudeness and also his make-matters-worse apology in silence. "They all think me of far less account than that wretchedly vulgar little snob," she said to herself bitterly. "What is the good of trying to keep any respect for one's self, when one is tied down to such a life as this?"

She went to the window and looked out; it was a good height from the ground, for Margot occupied an attic-bedroom of small dimensions. "What is the good of trying?" she said again, resting her arms on the window-ledge and staring blankly into space. "They don't care. I am superfluous, not wanted, in the way, a nuisance to them. What a life it is!" and then she fell into a reverie about life and the strangeness of it all, and, somehow, found herself

thinking of the sentence which had impressed her so strongly a few months before.

"Every man's life is a fairy-tale written by God's fingers." Yes, that was what the great Danish philosopher had thought and written! A fairy-tale. . . . Was her life a fairy-tale? Oh, no, no, a thousand times, no. A tragedy, a suffering, a mental void, a want, a blank . . . but a fairy-tale . . . never!

CHAPTER II.

IN this world nothing happens without causing an effect, and Margot's little passage of arms, or at least of words, with young Brown, although it seemed at the time only to have done her harm, proved to be the pivot upon which her whole life turned. To her mother she had now come to be viewed in the light of a person who must be carefully looked after. To Ethelwyn and Gwen she was simply a prig in petticoats, and the very sight of her or the mere sound of her name was enough to bore them to extinction. But, to Maudie, Margot appeared now in a totally new guise.

For instance, Maudie, all at once, became quite friendly with her young sister, and, that being so, she promptly set about altering and improving her general position, if not of mind or body, at least of estate.

"Mother," she remarked abruptly one morning, when Margot had gone off to do the shopping as usual, "you are having your At Home as usual next week?"

"Certainly," was Mrs. Blair's reply.

"Then Margot ought to have a new dress for it."

"Margot!" cried the two older girls, in tones of the utmost astonishment.

"Yes, Margot," returned Maudie, stoutly. "Why shouldn't Margot have a new frock sometimes like other girls?"

"But Margot is not out," cried Ethelwyn.

"Margot is nearly eighteen," Maudie said, which they all knew already.

"I really don't see," Mrs. Blair began.

"Look here, Mother," said Maudie, "it isn't right that one of your daughters should be dressed so that she is mistaken for a servant; it is not right. If you cannot give her the same dress allowance as we three have, we ought each to give up a little, so that she is made our equal."

"Preposterous!" cried Gwen.

"Margot is your equal," Maudie said, looking her sister full in the face. "And Margot will be a much handsomer woman some day than you will ever be, so there."

"Margot," said Gwen, with a sneer.

"Anyway, it is not a question for you to settle," Maudie went on valiantly. "And even if Mother

likes you better than her other children, it's a shame to make the favoritism so plain that it's a matter of open comment among our friends."

"What are you saying, Maudie?" Mrs. Blair cried, in a shocked tone.

"The truth, I'm afraid," answered Maudie. ¹

"If Margot really wants a new frock, which seems most absurd," said Ethelwyn, after looking at Gwen for a moment, "Gwen and I will give her our pale blue dresses; they will make her a beauty."

"How very generous of you!" laughed Maudie. "You have both taken more than the bloom off them. What a Yorkshire gift! Ethelwyn's has mud-marks all round the bottom of the skirt, and if I mistake not, Gwen tore hers badly at tennis the other day."

"I don't want to hear the subject discussed any further," put in the mother, at this point. "I am afraid, Maudie, I have considered you older girls a little too much. That I can care less for Margot than for any of you is manifestly absurd, and the mere suggestion of such a thing has hurt me very much. In future, Margot shall have the same dress allowance and privileges as the rest of you, and when once she is out, remember you must take everything strictly in turn."

"How detestable!" said Ethelwyn crossly.

"Simply disgusting," returned Gwen.

"Mother, you are a dear!" Maudie cried.

So Margot Blair found her school-girl days at an end, and herself accorded all the privileges of a come-out young lady. When the At-Home day came round again, she and Maudie agreed to share the responsibilities between them, and then Margot found that she had no more "young Browns" to put up with, and really enjoyed herself immensely.

And about a week after this, something very unlooked-for happened, for Mrs. Blair received a letter which set the entire family completely by the ears. For it was from a very old friend of Mrs. Blair's, who wrote, after a silence of many years, as follows:—

"MY DEAR MARY,—It is many years since I last had the pleasure of hearing from you, and as I chanced to hear of your address a few days ago from a friend, I thought I would write to you and see if you had forgotten me.

"I am, as you perceive, still alive, but in the enjoyment of very indifferent health. I suffer a good deal from rheumatic gout, which is a very wearing and painful complaint, and which I sincerely trust you will never have. I have left my own house and come to live here"—("She writes from Ramsgate," Mrs. Blair interpolated)—"where I have a nice house and see such people as find me out—chiefly, I fancy, with a view to my last will and testament."

"Horrid old thing!" said Gwen, with a sniff.

Mrs. Blair went on reading. "One of my

reasons for writing to you is to remind you that I have a sort of an idea that one of your children is my godchild. If she is a nice girl, and not gushing and giddy, I would like her, to come to me for a short visit, say from Monday to Saturday. If I like her, I can keep her longer, but I am too delicate now to put up with people, particularly young people, who do not adapt themselves to my ways and peculiarities.

"I should like to have your answer by return of post, if you are at home, and do pray let the young lady come on Monday next, without fail; don't on any account let her get anything extra for the occasion, and if my godchild is not the most sensible of your girls, send me the one that is.

"Your old friend,

"MARGARET CROFTON-CHUBB."

"Well, I do call that a most impertinent epistle," exclaimed Ethelwyn, in disgusted accents.

"Mrs. Crofton-Chubb was always very eccentric," her mother returned, "a most eccentric woman. I have not heard anything of her for years, and quite thought that she had forgotten all about us. She was really more your father's friend than mine. She used," she added reflectively, "to be a very rich woman."

"And which of us is her godchild?" Maudie inquired.

"Margot. That was why she was called

Margot. Mrs. Crofton-Chubb thought it such a pretty form of the name 'Margaret.' "

"Then will Margot have to go?" Gwen asked.

"I really think it would be as well," the mother answered. "It might mean a nice little legacy. And I dare say the poor old lady is dull and lonely, though it is true she has many relations of sorts."

"Then, do you want me to go, Mother?" Margot asked.

"I wish you to do just as you please about it," Mrs. Blair replied. "I think it would be very kind if you were to go."

"Oh, of course you must go, Margot," put in Gwen imperiously. Gwen was anxious on the subject, for during the following week they were invited to a ball, and it was, in the natural course of events, her turn to stay at home.

"Yes, I'll go," said Margot; I dare say I shall get on very well with her."

"And you'll remember, Margot, that Mrs. Crofton-Chubb is an old lady and has old-fashioned ideas about most things."

"Yes, don't be too clever, Margot," laughed Gwen, "she might think the Brown episode most unmaidenly and even immodest."

CHAPTER III.

SO Margot Blair, on the Monday following the receipt of the invitation, left her mother's house to pay her visit to a total stranger.

Mrs. Blair and Maudie went to the station and saw her off. "You will be sure to get something to eat in London," Mrs. Blair said anxiously just before the train started.

"Oh, yes, Mother," Margot replied.

"And remember that you must on no account speak to anyone; you cannot be too careful," Mrs. Blair continued, still anxious.

"Oh, yes; but don't worry about me. Think of little Brown whenever you feel inclined to fidget."

"And you'll send us a wire?"

"Yes, yes," laughing outright at the look in her mother's face.

It occurred to Mrs. Blair for the very first time in her life as the train began to move out of the station that Margot was growing handsome—yes, positively handsome. She gave or half gave expression to her thoughts. "How well she looks to-day!" she remarked to Maudie.

"Margot will be a very handsome woman. I always said so," returned Maudie without hesitation.

And in due course they received a wire to

say that the child had arrived safely at her destination. This was followed by a letter which told them that Mrs. Crofton-Chubb had received her very kindly, and that she was sure she should get on with her.

And before the end of the week, there came a highly characteristic epistle from the old lady herself.

"With your permission," it said, "I will keep Margot on a longer visit. She suits me. She stands fair and square on her own feet, and that, after the disgusting sycophancy which I have had to endure for years past, is a new and delightful experience, and one of which I do not think I shall tire for a long time. As you have so many girls, you will be able to spare one of them to me, and from what Margot tells me, I feel sure you will be very well able to get on without her for some little time."

"She *is* cool," was Ethelwyn's comment.

"Rich people often are," her mother replied.

But cool or not, with her eccentric godmother did Margot remain until her mother and sisters began to think that she never meant to come home again. Several times, when writing to her, Mrs. Blair hinted that she was afraid she might be out-staying her welcome, and every time that she did so, so surely did Mrs. Crofton-Chubb write and protest that she could not spare her god-child yet awhile, and she would therefore be infinitely obliged by her mother's

allowing her to remain a little longer. From Ramsgate they moved to London, and Margot was badly needed to see after getting the new flat into order. So it was not till nearly a year had gone by that Mrs. Blair one fine morning in June received a telegram to say that Margot would be home at seven o'clock.

They, that is Mrs. Blair and Maudie, went to the station to meet her, when surprise number one awaited them. Margot was travelling first class. "Very nice of her godmother to take her ticket," was the mother's first thought.

Then came surprise number two. Margot was travelling with a maid. "How foolish to go to the expense of providing her with an escort!" was Mrs. Blair's second thought.

Surprise number three, however, Margot kept until they got home.

"How do you think I look, Mother?" she asked, when she had taken off her hat.

"My dear child," Mrs. Blair returned, "I never saw anyone so altered or so improved in all my life. You have grown so handsome."

"My godmother thought I had better come home," said Margot, apparently not noticing her mother's remark.

"Well, you have made a regular visitation," the mother answered.

"Oh, but not for that reason. The fact is, Mother, with your consent, I am going to be married next month."

"To be married," Mrs. Blair cried.

"You, Margot!" cried the three girls together.

"Yes, I—see," taking a large photograph from her travelling bag, "this is—is the man. What do you think of him?"

"Why, he is glorious!" exclaimed Maudie excitedly.

"And his name?" her mother asked, feeling in an unaccountable way that she was now quite outside her daughter's life.

"Is Viscount Hedenham," said Margot softly.

* * * * *

One piece of jewelry Lady Hedenham always wears—it is a band of gold round her left wrist, which has her husband's Christian name set in diamonds around it. And within is engraved—

"Every man's life is a fairy-tale written by God's fingers."

BECAUSE—!

IT was in the early summer of the year of grace 1856 that a girl stood at the long French window of a charming vicarage in North Devon. She was young, and was fair to look upon, with hair yellow as the sand of the sea, put plainly back from a low brow and gathered into a great loose coil on the nape of the neck. Her eyes were grey and changeable as a dove's breast, her nose a little upturned, and her mouth a mouth that could smile, but was not smiling then: on the contrary it was cast in lines that were very sad. Her dress was white, of a thickish kind of muslin, which fell from her shapely waist in voluminous folds, but she was not sufficiently fashionable to be wearing the then new-fangled notion, which was afterwards called "crinoline." She was not alone. Very near to her was standing a young man, little more than a boy, with a sharp, terrier-like face, only redeemed from extreme ugliness by a pair of wonderfully wistful brown eyes. He was not quite so tall as she was, or, if he was so, her flowing robe gave her an appearance of advantage in height. He was holding one of her hands and speaking very earnestly.

"Will nothing I say move you?"

"Oh, my dear Tom, don't put it like that. You know I would have said 'yes' if I could, but I cannot. It is out of the question. You must not ask me again. Oh, Tom, Tom, why did you take this new notion into your head? You and I, who have been friends ever since we can remember anything, ever since we could toddle! How can you expect it? You ought not to have said a word. You know that neither your people nor mine would allow an engagement between us—you only nineteen and I not quite so much. It is really unkind of you. Now we shall never be the same again."

"But I want to know why?" he asked, "You know perfectly well that I am rich, or I shall be rich when I am one-and-twenty. I shall be very rich."

"Money is not everything," said the girl, turning her head uneasily from side to side. "You are too young, Tom. You ought to be at school yet—and so ought I, and I am very unhappy—and you have made me so. No; I don't take it as a compliment. You should not have asked me. I know that Mother will be furious about it. Now you have spoilt everything—everything, and we should have had such a good time this summer. Oh, why did you do it?"

The boy dropped her hand and laughed bitterly. "Why did I do it? Why? Because I

couldn't help it. How could I help it? You must have known, Gay, years and years ago, that I had no other thought than for you. You know I have had a wretched time, or I should have had a wretched time but for your people. It is so long since my mother died, and my father never cared anything about me. I had nobody but your people, no sympathy except from your mother, no joy in life except for yourself. I know that I am very young. I know I am only nineteen. I can't help being nineteen—I shall be ninety if I live long enough."

"Yes, I know, Tom; but really I can't say anything else."

"But let me speak to your father; let me talk it over with your mother. They are reasonable people. They would like you to live here close to them. I can't imagine anything that they would approve of more. We should have to wait until I was one-and-twenty, of course, because it is absurd for a chap to think of marrying before that. It is far better that I should go into the Service knowing what my life is going to be, and if you care for me——"

"Oh, Tom, I don't in that way. Really I don't. We have been like brother and sister. I—I—must marry a man that I can look up to, and I can't look up to you. Why, it would be too funny! I couldn't do it."

"I don't wish you to look up to me, for I don't want to look down upon you."

"I should think not," said she, with a total change of voice.

"Then I will speak to your father now. I will go and talk it over with your mother first."

"No, you are not to do so. I don't want to marry you. I don't care for you in that way. You mustn't ask it, indeed you mustn't ask it."

Sir Thomas suddenly turned and looked at her, his sharp face a little paler, his brown eyes dark with pain. "Gay," he said, in a tone of suppressed excitement, "have you any reason for feeling this disinclination of thinking of me except as a brother?"

"No, Tom, I have no reason ; but I don't feel like that towards you, and I can't help it. These things come without our wishing or acting one way or the other. I cannot marry you because you are Sir Thomas Trevor. I cannot marry you because Trevor Court is the finest place for twenty miles round. It would be mean of me. I couldn't take into consideration that you are an excellent match. Oh, I couldn't! You are my brother, and I have never thought of you or never likened you for a moment to the man who might be my lover. Why, it's absurd! You and I, who have fought each other many and many a time! Why, Tom, if I went to church to say I should love,

honor and obey you I should burst out laughing, I should indeed."

"Well," said he, "but by that time you would have got to feel differently about me."

"Never! Never!" she cried, with all the terrible truthfulness of extreme youth. "I never should."

"Gay," said he, "there *is* somebody else."

"I don't know what you mean by somebody else, Tom," said Gay Kenworthy, in a rather offended voice. "I have met other people beside yourself, of course; most girls in any sphere of life have met more than one man by the time they are my age—eighteen and three-quarters."

"Yes, but somebody that you would rather marry than me."

"My dear Tom," said she, "I hate to say things to hurt you, but, believe me, I would rather marry anybody than you—I would really. It isn't that I want to hurt you, but I look upon you as my brother, and you should have told me this long ago—you should not have waited until you were turned nineteen and then expected to have everything upon a totally different footing. It's no use, Tom, it's no use, I can't marry you!"

"Then," said Tom, "I suppose it's no use saying any more. I must just swallow the pill, bitter as it is, and go."

"I think you are very unkind," she said; "very unkind."

"Yes, and what I think of you matters little; but still, you remember this—that as long as life lasts Tom Trevor is your servant—your slave. Send for me from the ends of the world and I will come. Make your own life. I am only nineteen," with a pitiful quiver in his boyish voice, "but I am a hundred and nineteen in the firmness of my resolution. This is no idle promise, no braggart's boast. You may scorn me—I may be too young, I know I am nothing to look at. You may have regarded me as your brother all your life, but yours I am, true and faithful to death itself; and whether you take me or leave me will make no matter to my part of the bargain. I am going now. You need not fret about me. You need not think when I am away that you are keeping me from my home, because I love you too well to put even a shadow upon your bright life. Good-bye, Gay."

It seemed to the girl afterwards as if she stood just where he left her for an eternity, but in reality it was not very long. There are moments in our lives which seem each like a lifetime. At first she stood quite still, trying to control the sobs which shook her, to force back the tears ready to flow. She was so sorry for him, and yet to marry Tom Trevor, with his little sharp face and his little pert nose, his

horsy dress, and his big, ridiculous eyes ! Oh, it was out of the question ! It could not be. And even as she thought another face rose in her mind's eye—a face so different—the face of a man ten or twelve years older than Tom Trevor, a face for a young girl to dream of, a face that little children trusted, the face of a man as good as gold, and as brave as a lion. Of course, he would never look at her. She had danced with him a few times at one of the garrison balls during the winter ; he had come out to the pretty vicarage certainly, to make a pretence of playing bowls, and to bring her the latest song ; but Gay knew that he would never, never think of her in any other way than as a little country girl who amused him for an hour or two—and yet, the steadfast eyes, the firm mouth, the long lithe figure, they had all found themselves a place in her heart. And the heart at nineteen is very young ; it is guided so much by the externals, it thinks so little of those sordid matters which move the world so powerfully. Nineteen is very fresh, little troubled by mercenary feelings, and a smile and a certain litheness mean so much to it. And Gay was not yet even nineteen years old !

Of course, when her mother returned, she saw that the girl had been crying, and like most mothers she asked the reason. Gay prevaricated. She said she did not feel very well ;

but later on Mrs. Kenworthy invaded the sanctity of the little white bed-chamber, so symbolical of her only daughter's innocent life.

"My dear," she said, "you may as well tell me first as last. What happened to-day while I was out?"

"Oh, Mother!" she said, in a choking voice.

"Yes, I know, dear; but what was it?"

So, little by little, the girl let the story fall from her unwilling lips. "You don't want me to marry Tom Trevor?" she said, in a distressed tone, and spreading her hands out as if it was the cruellest thing that could happen to any girl. "You don't think of whether he is rich, and whether he is the squire of the place and all that, Mother?"

Mrs. Kenworthy moved away. "My dear," she said, "if you had been in love with Tom, neither your father nor I would have objected on the score of his youth. Of course, it would have been a very good marriage for you—he would have been a very good husband to you, and your position would have been a most brilliant one; but your father and I married for love, and I refused a nobleman only a few weeks before your father asked me to marry him. I have never regretted it, and I would be the last in the world to urge a child of mine, to say nothing of your being my only one, to go against the best dictates of her own heart; but

at the same time, I must say I am sorry for the poor boy."

However, Mrs. Kenworthy's sorrow for the poor boy did not in the least alter Gay's feeling on the matter, nor had she intended that it should do so.

The sleepy summer days went sleepily over. They heard that Tom was gone to join his regiment, and before the summer flowers had waned a wonderful thing had happened in Gay Kenworthy's life! For that other one, the one she had thought would never think of her as his wife, asked her out under the beech trees one softly darkening evening to give herself to him for ever.

And Gay said yes!

Nearly a year had gone by. Gay Wardell's dovelike eyes no longer looked at the sun shining in English skies; no, when they ventured to lift themselves to that majestic orb, it looked at her from the cloudless blue of an Indian firmament. Life was going very hardly with the little girl reared in the peaceful atmosphere of a Devonshire vicarage. Each day might be their last on earth, each hour, each moment was bringing them nearer and nearer to the end when the enemy would hem them in and their portion would be martyrdom. Relief might come; the horde of black faces which daily threatened them might be driven back, but it was an unlikely contingency to arise. They

were so few, their means were so circumscribed, and grim death walked abroad in many forms. Oftentimes the girl thought of the past, of the quiet vicarage standing on a sunny slope with its background of beeches, behind which the hill rose clear and sharp against the sky, and beyond the lawn the changing, palpitating, old, and yet ever new, and to her always friendly sea. Oh, how she longed amid Indian heats, siege privations, in desperate anxiety and hourly dread, for just one breath of that pure peaceful air! Dives in torment did not long more utterly for the drop of water from Lazarus's finger than Gay Wardell longed for a sight of her English home. But it was so useless, so useless! There they were, the football of Fate, to be tossed hither and thither, and it seemed as if the kindest thing left to do for her was a bullet from her husband's hand. Day after day crept slowly, heavily by. Day by day water failed, food ran short, heroes and heroines passed over the dark river and entered into glory, and yet the end was not!

The end was not to be, for when almost the last hour had come they heard shouts in the distance. Oh, the excitement was too vibrating for those prisoned amid that crowd of savage foes to hear clearly and distinctly what shouts they were, or how near they came! But it was soon over. There was a rush, a sharp scuffle, a clang of arms, and British cheers

above Sepoy yells, and then the gates were opened—those frail barriers that they had thought would last but a few hours longer, and in streamed the welcome red coats and white helmets of their own countrymen.

It was all over ; the danger was past, and Gay leaned up against her husband sick and faint and trembling with the fear of what might have been. But what was that ? One of the rescuers wounded ! Oh ! She was almost the only woman left, and she pressed forward as women did in those days to see what help she could give. "Such a hero !" one of the newcomers was saying as she passed. "Poor chap ! He got that wound as he hacked down the brute who was setting light to a train which would have blown you all into eternity ! You can do nothing for him."

She went on ; it was only a few steps, and knelt down beside the dying man. "Oh, Tom !" she cried, in a voice of recognition. "Why did you do it ? Why did you do it ?"

He looked up. "I knew you were in here," he said in a far-away voice.

"Oh, Tom !" she almost wailed. "Why did you do it ?"

There was silence for a moment, then he looked at her with an ineffable smile. "Because —," he began ; but the rest of the sentence was spoken in glory.

INTO THE LIGHT.

"A light of duty shines on every day
For all."—WORDSWORTH.

CHAPTER I.

THE room was large and most cosily furnished, the light from the blazing fire played on the rich tones of old tapestry and gilded cabinets, on couches and chairs covered with heavy brocades, on picture frames and old china, and on the figure of a very old woman, huddled up on a very wide sofa drawn near to the fireside.

"How are you feeling now, Grannie?" asked a fresh young voice, which came somewhere from the neighborhood of the door.

"No better—very ill to-day, Bliss," was the reply, and truly the old lady's voice sounded like the voice of a very old woman, and also a very sick one.

The girl called Bliss advanced into the circle of light cast by the fire. "Is the pain so bad, dear?" she asked, in a tone of infinite pity, and taking one of the slender old hands in her own strong young grasp and slowly smoothing it up and down.

"Not so bad now you have come, Bliss."

Bliss drew a low stool near to the couch and went on stroking and smoothing the wrinkled hand. "It is hard you should suffer so, dear," she said gently. "Have you been wanting me? Why didn't you send for me? I would have come half an hour ago."

"I thought you would be coming. I don't want to make a slave of you," the old woman said, gazing at the girl with a pair of short-sighted and startlingly blue eyes. "Where is Monica?"

"She is upstairs," Bliss answered, still softly chafing the hand she held.

"What is she doing? Why does she never come near me?" the old lady asked querulously.

"Well, Grannie dear, Monica is a little excited to-day. You see, it is her first ball, and she is busy putting the finishing touches to her gown."

"H'm, a pretty little figure she is to go to a ball," the old woman went on. "It is seventy years since I went to my first ball. I was just sixteen. And I was a beauty then, the toast of three counties. But Monica—pooh, she ought to go to bed and try to grow pretty."

"You are very hard on Monica," said Bliss, laughing outright at the old lady's blunt remarks. "A good many people think her very pretty. I do, for one."

"Pretty," cried old Lady Mary, with a sudden access of energy. "Why, she is just about as pretty as a clothes-prop. . . . Oh—oh—Bliss—the pain—Bliss—Bliss!"

In a trice they had forgotten Monica Forde as completely as though she had never lived. Bliss flew to the little table where the different medicines were kept, and began, as steadily as her shaking fingers would allow, to count out a certain number of drops from a curiously shaped bottle into a wine-glass half full of water. "Drink this, Granny," she said, holding the glass to Lady Mary's lips. "Steady, dear, steady. There, that is better, is it not?"

For a few minutes the old lady did not, nay, could not speak. Then she looked up piteously at the girl, her brow damp with agony, her face pale and worn, and her whole body shrunk and exhausted with the violence of the spasms which had racked her small, slight frame. "I don't know what I should do without you, Bliss," she gasped painfully. "You were rightly named when they called you Bliss. You've been my Bliss ever since I first fetched you away from Jersey, eighteen years ago. You won't go away, you won't desert me, promise me that you won't do that."

She clung to the girl with a tenacity which was wonderful in one of her years and infirmities, and Bliss petted and soothed her as if she had been the older of the two.

"Dear Granny, I am not thinking of going away," she answered soothingly. "Don't worry yourself about such a thing. I would not go away and leave you to bear your pain alone for all the world."

"Ah, it is easy to say 'No' to all the world," returned grannie, in her most cynical tones.

"You are better," said Bliss, smiling at her and nodding her graceful head.

"I don't mean it, child," the old woman cried. "No, no, I never mean it, when I let slip those bitter things. I've lived too long. That is just the truth."

"Not too long for me, dear," said Bliss instantly. "But tell me, would you not like a cup of tea? Your drops always make you so thirsty."

"Yes, yes, you always know what I want before I want it," Lady Mary cried, leaning back on her pillows with a weary air.

Bliss rang the bell. "Bring her ladyship's tea, and as soon as you can get it," she said to the servant who answered the summons.

"I hope my lady has not had another attack," said the man with much concern.

"Yes, Walters, another very bad attack, and tea is the one thing, as you know. . . ."

"In two minutes, ma'am," he said, bustling softly out of the room.

"What was Walters talking about?" the old lady asked, in her indistinct high-pitched voice.

"He was afraid you had had another attack, Grannie," Bliss replied. "He is dreadfully concerned."

"A good creature, a very faithful creature," murmured Lady Mary weakly.

"Oh, quite devoted to you, dear," said Bliss, who thought a great deal of the elderly servant, who had been with her grandmother more years than she had been in the world.

It was wonderful what a cup of strong and fragrant tea did for the old lady, who revived under its influence to an almost incredible extent.

"Why doesn't Monica come and get some tea?" she exclaimed crossly at last. "What can the silly child be doing all this time?"

"Chiefly standing rapturously looking at her new dress and wondering how many partners she will get, with now and then a qualm that perhaps she won't get any at all," answered Bliss, with a gay laugh.

"What a little fool," remarked Lady Mary with huge contempt. "When I used to go to balls, I never had any qualms—I left those for the men."

"Ah, but you were the toast of three counties, Grannie," suggested Bliss slyly.

"And Monica will never be that, no, nor of one," said the old lady with decision. "Another cup of tea, Bliss, not quite so sweet, child. What is Monica going to wear to-night?"

"All white, Grannie," Bliss replied. "Very

soft and fluffy white, with white roses here and there."

"That is right enough," Lady Mary admitted.

"By-the-by, Grannie," said Bliss, "you have not given her anything to wear round her neck."

"I know," was the very unsatisfactory reply.

"But you are going to give her something out of your pretty store," Bliss went on, in her own masterful way. "You gave me something when I came out, and you should not make distinctions between us. She is your grandchild just the same as I am."

"Well, I'll see."

"I'll go and fetch your case," said Bliss cheerfully.

"No, no, you haven't told me what you are going to wear yourself yet."

"Pink, Grannie, all pink. Dress, shoes, fan, flowers, even my gloves. I am to be all pink," she answered.

She went away then and fetched a jewel case of goodly size, which she put down in front of the old lady, well knowing that it would amuse her and take her out of herself better than anything else she could suggest. Lady Mary roused herself and sat up turning over the glittering contents like a pleased child, as indeed she really was.

"These," said Bliss with decision, taking out a string of large and lovely pearls, "these are

the very things for a young girl to wear on her coming out."

"No, no, much too good ; and they go with the pearls that I gave you two years ago. No, no, this if you like, but not the pearls on any account. They are for you."

"Oh, Grannie, what a dear you are !" Bliss cried, for what young girl can resist rare and lovely pearls ? "And you will give her the turquoises ? Well, they are very beautiful. They will go with her white frock charmingly."

"Put them round your neck," said Lady Mary, holding out the string of pearls.

Bliss bent her head. "You put them on, dear," she said gently.

With trembling hands the old lady clasped the pearls around her granddaughter's shapely throat. "Bless you, my dear," she said. "*My Bliss.*" And for answer, Bliss took the withered slender hand and kissed it.

CHAPTER II.

THREE hours had gone by. The two girls at the Manor House were dressing for the ball and chattering like two monkeys over the process. "How good of Grannie to give me such a beautiful necklace !" exclaimed Monica Forde, as she clasped the turquoises round her neck. "She *is* a dear old thing !"

"They suit your dress to perfection," replied Bliss, looking at her critically. "Yes, what is it?" she asked, turning to a maid who had entered the room.

"With her ladyship's love," said the girl, unfolding the wrapper from two bouquets, one of white flowers with white streamers, the other of France roses, tied with pink ribbons. "And this for Miss Markham and there is a note with it."

"Lucky girl to have two," cried Monica, turning herself slowly round before the glass that she might see the full effect of her appearance.

Bliss took the second bouquet, with a burning blush rising in her cheeks, and opening the note, read it with a tender light in her eyes, which augured well for the writer thereof. It was very short and very much to the point :—

"MY BLISS,—Forgive me for presuming to call you so without having your permission. I greatly hope that from to-night you will let me call you so for always. I send you some flowers. Will you honor me and make me very happy by carrying them to-night? Dear Bliss, you must know how, for weeks and weeks, I have been trying to tell you how I love you, to tell you all that is in my heart. I go away to-morrow early, and join the *Euphrates* in the afternoon. I may be years away; I shall be away forever if you are cruel to me to-night.

"I live in hope and, need I say, in the direst suspense?

"Yours always,

"ALICK FEATHERSTONE."

Bliss thrust the note down into the safe recesses of her low bodice. A happy smile was playing about her mouth as she took up the beautiful bouquet of flowers that her lover had sent her. She never questioned whether she should wear them or not, but said to the maid, "Justine, if her ladyship asks you by-and-bye what flowers I wore be sure you do not tell her. I will tell her to-morrow why I chose these."

"Certainly, mad'm'selle," said Justine, who understood perfectly and knew quite well from whom the flowers came.

A moment later Lady Mary's own maid came running in without any attempt at ceremony. "Oh, Miss Bliss!" she cried, "do come quick, quick, my lady is so ill, and begging for you."

By this time Bliss was half-way to her grandmother's room, and seeing what was wrong flew to get the drops, which were the only medicine which in any way alleviated the frightful agony that, sooner or later, would assuredly bring her frail life to a close.

"Grannie," she said imperatively, "let me lift you up while you drink this."

The very sound of her voice seemed to act like a charm on the gasping woman, and she managed to hold the glass so that she was able to drink its contents easily.

"Now, that is better," she said soothingly. But the old lady was shaken and exhausted beyond words to express, and she gazed up at

Bliss with an anxious look in her eyes that went with a pang to the girl's inmost heart.

"I'm much worse," she moaned; "two attacks in one day, Bliss. I'm very much worse."

"I hope not, Grannie dear," said Bliss, who knew that what she said was true.

"You won't leave me, Bliss? Must you go out to-night?" Lady Mary cried in a pathetic, imploring whisper.

Before Bliss could speak, however, the door opened and Monica came in. "Is Granny ill?" she asked in an awe-struck voice.

"Poor Grannie has had a bad turn," said Bliss, still holding the old lady's hand in hers.

"Because Mrs. Greville has just come, or rather she came ten minutes ago, and she is so impatient. She says she cannot wait unless we come at once."

"Then let her go," said Bliss curtly.

"But, Bliss, we can't go to the ball without her," Monica persisted. "What are we to do?"

"Don't leave me, Bliss," came the imploring tones from the bed.

Bliss hesitated for a moment . . . a wild thought of all that she was giving up by not going to the ball flashed across her mind, her heart sank down to zero at the remembrance of the lover who was going away on the morrow, and of how impossible it would be to send to him at that hour and with her grandmother so

ill. She drew a deep breath . . . after all, Grannie had been everything to her during all her life—father, mother, brother, sister, *all*. Should she then fail her just for the sake of her own advantage or pleasure? No, a thousand times, no.

“Grannie,” she said softly, bending down over the couch, “you don’t mind Monica going to the ball, do you?”

“No, no, but not you,” came the feeble reply; “you stay with me, Bliss, you stay with me.”

“Yes, dear, yes, I will stay. Monica, you go. Don’t keep Mrs. Greville waiting. Tell her how it is.”

And Monica went. I am bound to confess that Bliss saw her go with a great pang at her heart, and a wild wish that she could have sent a message by her to explain to Alick Featherstone why she had not come.

But it was impossible. Monica had never seen Mr. Featherstone and Mrs. Greville was impatiently waiting below, while poor old Grannie was hanging upon Bliss’s movements all the time as if, were she to let her out of her sight for even a moment, she would certainly be spirited away.

So Bliss went to her room and slipped off her pretty gown, telling Justine to put it away; and then she went back to Lady Mary’s room to sit by her and soothe her, and try to make her for-

get the awful pain if she could. And all the time in her own heart a dirge was wailing, wailing the funeral hymn of her life's sweetest love-story.

Heavy as lead was her heart, yet she was outwardly as gentle and patient with the suffering grannie, who in truth had worked herself into a fever by her dread of the girl's going out of the house for a few hours. And presently she had the satisfaction of seeing her drop off into a fairly sound sleep. She remained watching her for a few minutes, and then the maid beckoned her out of the hot and stifling room.

"Do go down, Miss Bliss," she said. "Walters has some hot coffee waiting for you, and you may be wanted again before the night is over. I've sent for the doctor. I have it on my mind that my lady is worse than we think. I couldn't ask you for fear she heard me and was frightened."

"You were quite right," said Bliss, looking down upon the wan and suffering face among the pillows.

"But do go down," entreated the maid, "and stay a little while. I'll fetch you if my lady wants you."

"Thank you, Mercy," said Bliss gratefully.

So she went down to the deserted morning-room, where Lady Mary usually sat, and the stately Walters brought her fresh coffee and asked the latest news of his lady. And then he

went away and she was left alone, and free to think over the hopeless and unavoidable ruin which that evening had come into her life.

She sat there for a long time trying to persuade herself that perhaps it was all for the best, that when one tried very hard for a certain thing, and failed in getting it, it generally turned out to be all for the best ; trying to make believe that there was a fate against her meeting with Alick Featherstone, and that she ought and would, if she were a sensible girl, take the evening's mishap as a warning and think no more about him.

Yet she could not help thinking, thinking, thinking about him—thinking how handsome and brave and true he was, and how dearly and utterly she loved him, how she loved the very ground he walked on, and the very air that he breathed. And while she was sitting there crouched up in a big chair near to the fire, the door opened and Walters, with a highly apologetic look, came in.

“ I am very sorry to disturb you, Miss Bliss,” he said with a deprecating cough, “ but there is a gentleman who says he must see you, if only for a minute. He was so very urgent, I ventured to ask you.”

Walters did not add that the gentleman's urgency had taken the form of a golden sovereign ; but that was neither here nor there.

“ The girl's heart gave a great throb and

then bounded on as if it had gone mad. "What is his name?" she asked, with a very fair show of calmness.

"Mr. Featherstone," Walters answered.

"Well, you had better show him in, Walters. It *is* rather late, but I will see him."

So the respectable Walters retired, and after a moment's absence, returned, bringing Alick Featherstone in his wake. Bliss rose to meet him, and found herself confronted by a splendid creature in the full uniform of a Lancer regiment; but she did not speak till Walters had closed the door behind him.

"I have come for my answer," he said simply.

"How did you know?" she asked.

"I happened to be introduced to your cousin, and she was full of her disappointment at your not being able to come to-night—and yours," he added, in an undertone.

"Monica knew nothing at all about mine," Bliss cried, but something in her tone encouraged him to go on.

"I gathered from her exactly how it was, and how you would not leave poor Lady Mary; and as I am off in the morning, I thought it would be best to drive straight over and find out whether I am to come back again or not."

"I could not leave. My dear old Grannie has been an angel to me all my life," Bliss cried, "and it was all I could do for her to stay with her when she is ill. She is asleep now,

Heaven be thanked, but her suffering to-day has been dreadful."

"I am glad not to find her worse," he said.
"But about my coming back——"

"If you want to come back," began Bliss demurely.

"The question is whether *you* want me to come," he said eagerly.

"If you go by my wishes," said she—

"Yes?"—

"Then you won't go away at all," Bliss whispered.

THE END.



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